University of Alberta

The Experience of Building a Positive Gay Identity

by

Kevin George Alderson ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Counselling Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1998

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Abstract

This qualitative study utilized a heuristic methodology to investigate the question, "what is the experience of men who construct and integrate a positive gay identity?" Fifteen gay men and one gay adolescent were interviewed. The 16 co-researchers completed questionnaires designed by the author to provide biographical information and ratings of sexual orientation. Each co-researcher provided his own definition of "positive gay identity" and used a Likert-type scale to measure his perceived attainment of it.

The findings suggested that gay men experience a great deal of conflict before coming out to themselves. The conflict was conceptualized as a struggle between catalysts, which inform gay males that they are gay, and hindrances, which suppress these affirming messages. Familial, cultural, church, peer, and societal influences could serve as either.

During the coming out period (i.e., self-identifying as gay), many new emotions are experienced, beliefs are restructured, and new behaviors and roles are learned. As certainty around one's sexual orientation develops, the foundation for a gay identity is formed.

Construction of a *positive* gay identity requires additional work, however. The gay man begins to embrace self-love, develops a sense of wholeness and authenticity, and feels empowered. Strength of character, autonomous thinking, and standing up for one's beliefs become much more evident.

The positive gay man also finds ways to connect with the gay world and ways to reconnect with the straight world. The involvement in the gay community varies, but

there is often a sense of gay pride and desire to celebrate one's gayness. The pursuit of intimacy often occurs. Positive gay men want to give something back to other gay people. Disclosing to others and dealing with family are also often challenging acts, as is learning to manage the consequences of being gay.

The resolution of a positive gay identity leads eventually to an integration between self and the gay and straight worlds. Becoming a positive gay man is about one's unique way of constructing a viable, healthy identity.

Dedication

To Dr. Gary Sanders, who taught me how to love myself.

To my two children, Troy and Shauna Alderson, who taught me why I needed to.

Acknowledgements

Working on a dissertation is an enormous undertaking, and I am deeply indebted to my two supervisors, Dr. Ronna Jevne and Dr. John Mitchell, for their encouragement and inspiration. Both have coached me and mentored me through my proudest accomplishment. Thank you.

The other committee members, Dr. Barbara Paulson, Dr. Fern Snart, Dr. Donald Sawatzky, and Dr. David Wangler are thanked for their participation in the completion of this work. I also thank Dr. Donald Knowles for his role as the external reader of the dissertation.

I am very appreciative of the time and energy offered by the 16 co-researchers who participated in this study. Sadly, two are no longer with us, and I regret that neither had the opportunity to see the finished product.

My sincere gratitude is extended to Dr. Lorne Warneke and Dr. John Sneep for their guidance through my practicum experiences, which helped lay the groundwork for this research. Notable thanks to Dr. Lynda Phillips who supervised a practicum where I counselled persons with HIV and AIDS and also helped me find two co-researchers. These practicum experiences deeply enriched my life and my understanding of positive gay identity.

Special thanks are offered to my ex-wife, who continues to be one of my strongest supporters. She has become the primary caregiver for our two children. By encouraging them to become accepting people, she honors me. I also thank my mother and my late father, without whom none of this would have been possible.

Finally, I would like to thank my life partner, Kevin, who has been there for me since the beginning of this dissertation. His companionship and devotion has greatly eased my struggle. He remains my role model of positive gay identity.

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CHAPTER ONE:

The Experience of Building a Positive Gay Identity

> *I feel like Rip Van Winkle sometimes, like I'm just waking up. Things like crying -- I find myself crying now. I had given it up when I was eight. Or laughing. Giggling. Roughhousing with my kids and having it be safe. Playing. Getting angry at somebody I love. Telling the truth. Feeling something in the moment it's actually happening, instead of five minutes later, five years later, always later. Taking risks I never would have taken before. Just kind of waking up. It's a silly metaphor, but it's what flowers do. They just come out.*
>
> *(Bass & Davis, 1992, p. 168).*

Introduction

. . . Positive gay identity. A few years ago I didn't know what it meant to be gay, let alone what it would mean someday to love myself. One definition of the word *gay* in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate dictionary (1996, p. 483, 1b) is *"keenly alive and exuberant."* That says it well for me.

I know each of us has different issues to face. I, for example, am 41 years old, I have two children, I have been a psychologist for twelve years, and yet I only *came out*[1] five years ago. Why did it take so long? I have asked myself this many times, initially with guilt, and now only with occasional sorrow.

Thank God I have the chance to finally live my life with integrity. I have often wondered if there is anything more important than this. Being true to yourself is the lesson I most want to teach my children. I think I finally know how. As adults, I believe we are deeply diminished without a strong sense of our own identity, and a love of that which we see when we look in the mirror.

In my career to date, I've felt blessed that I have had the opportunity to touch people's lives in meaningful ways, as others have touched mine. At age thirty-six, I needed help, and the ensuing therapy led to my self-identification as gay. This journey was more painful, more disturbing, and yet more transcending than anything I had ever experienced. This dissertation is a mirror of my own salvation. It is also the story of another sixteen men who have transcended barriers to become gay[2] and positive about their journeys.

---

[1] *Coming out* is a term that has multiple meanings in the literature and in the vernacular. In this dissertation, it will refer to the process of self-identifying as gay.

Autobiographical Connections

> *Shortly after the dawn of my enlightenment (i.e., after labelling myself as gay), I noticed that my rose-colored glasses had turned black . . . sooty and dirty. As I frantically tried to clean them, they eventually turned shades of grey. My vision was still blurred, and I was probably more confused than I have ever felt before in my life. Finally, I had all of the dirt off my glasses, but their rose color never returned. They became pink . . . a brilliant pink. I don't think I can ever see the world the same way through these glasses again. No doubt, my vision is richer now.*
>
> *(journal entry, March 29, 1996).*

My complete story, like those of my sixteen co-researchers, will appear in chapter four. Here I will share my personal reasons for choosing my research question, my experience during the summer I attempted to look "gay," and my assumptions which underlie this dissertation.

Although I had felt strong attractions to males since adolescence, I ignored my homoaffiliative feelings and my homoerotic desires. Instead, I carried on the heterosexual facade to the best of my ability. No one else seemed to suspect either. I dated and eventually married. I had children. I succeeded at my job. I created a successful private practice. I taught. I mentored. I worked . . . and worked . . . and worked . . . and successfully avoided that which I had minimized successfully for 35 years.

Successful by so many external signs, yet so unhappy and lacking internally. My spirit didn't let me sleep forever. Feelings are either faced, or they haunt you. Until there is a voice, there are no words to make sense of experience. My therapist helped me find a voice, and while I cried the word "*gay*," another part of me began to sing it.

As I worked through my reconstruction of self, I often wondered how it took me so long to find myself. I also wondered if every other gay man had had an equally difficult time of coming out to himself. In my attempt to understand what it meant to be gay, I began to read, and to meet other gay men. It struck me that the gay community is quite diverse, but that there was a qualitative difference between those who had come to rejoice as gay men, and those who regretted their gay identity to some extent. As I reviewed my own gay development, I began to see that a progression was occurring which was ultimately helping me to let go of old social scripts and adopt new ones. A big part of my growth was reducing *internalized homophobia*, which is the *homophobia*[3] that I had absorbed by living in this society. My intuition and reading were telling me that this is a common problem for gay individuals. How then do some people "break free" and begin to live happy lives as gay men? This question began to fill my consciousness, and as I applied to graduate schools, I knew I wanted to do research looking at some aspect of gay identity.

---

[2] Later I clarify that the word *gay* represents a freely-chosen identity, whereas *homosexual* desire, attraction, and affect are constitutents of sexual orientation, which is considered immutable.

As I wrote earlier, no one seemed to suspect that I might be gay when I was younger. After coming out, most of the people I eventually disclosed to were quite shocked. Two people who knew me well, however, retorted that they suspected soon after meeting me years earlier. Nonetheless, I assumed that if I wanted to, I could hide my orientation quite well, and I wondered what it would feel like to be identified as gay. While attending the University of Alberta, I decided to find out. On June 21, 1996, I had my hair dyed platinum blonde. Together with my age, the "Caesar" haircut, the earring, and rather flamboyant clothing, I decided that I had developed the closest to a stereotypical *"gay look"*[4] that was possible for me. The most significant event occurred days later on Canada Day (i.e., July 1, 1996) while at Sylvan Lake, Alberta walking down the beach with my partner:

> *Lots of looks, smirks, stares, laughter, whispers -- no one to my face, however. Lots of macho-looking redneck guys here today. (Later at night while in tent) My partner and I overhear teens kicking a ball outside our tent. The first male says emphatically, "watch where you kick the ball -- that's where the fags are!" The second male says, shushing the first, "they're there, you know." The female teenager then speaks up and says, "do you guys have a problem with that?" [referring presumably to the fact that we're gay]. After my partner falls asleep, I cry. The hurt is not just for me, but for others who have had to endure this and much worse.*
>
> *(journal entry, July 1, 1996).*

---

[3] *Homophobia* is the fear and/or hatred of homosexuals and homosexuality. It includes the discrimination and prejudice against gay persons and bisexuals (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1993).

[4] In actuality, there is no such thing as a *gay look*. It is impossible to tell who is gay and who is not by their appearance.

I took a summer class and when my turn came to give the thought for the day, I disclosed to the entire class of 14 women and two men. I felt really nervous and it was hard. After my disclosure, we spend a fair amount of time discussing it. One woman broke into tears as she empathized with me. Other shared some very positive feedback.

It was mostly an uneventful summer. I think Canadians tend to leave one another alone, or maybe it's a result of my age. Aside from hearing a few people call me a *"faggot"* under their breath, the only other significant memory was when I went hiking by myself in the Canadian Rockies. It is customary practice to greet others whom you meet while on a hiking trail. As I approached the elder Caucasian couple, I greeted them and smiled. Both ignored me completely and kept walking as though I didn't exist. I think in retrospect, it was far more difficult for me **before** I came out. Then, I used to ignore myself, and that seemed far more distressing. At age 39, I don't think I really cared what anyone thought. After all, what did I really have to lose? My career was already established and my life pretty well settled. I am curious what it is like for others who have come out at a younger age compared to myself. Is their experience different?

Before I move on to looking at my research question, and why I chose a heuristic methodology, I think it is important to share the assumptions that underlie my research, my *modus operandi* if you will. I think that researchers often find what they are looking for, and that truth is shaped by one's desire to find a certain truth.

I am not interested in the cause of homosexuality any more than I am interested in the cause of heterosexuality. A debate along these lines continues, and I will review in chapter two the two "camps" of the nature-nurture controversy as it affects gay identity. Ultimately, I agree with John Money's (1988, p. 123) view that

> homosexuality is always biological and always mental, both together. It is mental because it exists in the mind. It is biological because the mind exists in the brain. Whether the determining agents of homosexuality are innate and biological or acquired and social is beside the point. The point is that they are determinants, no matter where they come from, or when they occur.

Although some contemporary clinicians continue to believe that homosexuality results from inferior development and is a pathological condition (Nicolosi, 1991), I can not and will not accept that view. The struggle that I and my co-researchers have experienced has not been, in our view, to adopt a positive view of a negative condition, but rather to continually work at adopting a still more positive view of a positive condition. In the next chapter, I will provide academic support for this position.

Lastly, I believe that a positive gay identity is something that can be acquired and that more gay men would adopt one if they knew how. It is my hope that my research will help speak to this challenge.

The Question

I searched intensively to find a research question and methodology that would look at some aspect of building a positive gay identity. The research question had to have significance to me personally to maintain my interest and passion. For this to occur, it would need to encourage a holistic view of experience, including the feelings, and profound emotions, that accompany such a monumental task in a gay man's life.

The study had to allow a methodology that would not put everyone into the same "box." Such reductionism would imply that all gays are the same, and that they must work through the same issues. The methodology would need to be congruent with my view that all people are equal, and that we are undergoing a dynamic process of continual change and evolution. The truth of an individual's life today is potentially tomorrow's lie. One's personal truths are relative, changing as we change.

Perhaps of greatest significance, I asked myself that if I knew that my life would be over upon completing my dissertation, what about it would I embrace? Mostly, I would want to leave something behind that others would want to read and remember. As they would learn about the struggles of gay individuals, an impact might be felt personally. I would also want to leave something behind for my children so that they might come to understand my love, and the beauty that it generates. For all these reasons, I have arrived at the following research question: ***"what is the experience of men who construct and integrate a positive gay identity?"*** The answer to this question will help illuminate the challenge that this entails, given the present political climate in Alberta which is largely unsupportive of gay individuals.

Relevance of the Study

I see the importance of this question from the following perspectives:

1. Assisting Gay Men - Much can be learned by understanding the experience of others, who by definition of their positive identity, become models whom others may aspire to emulate. It is reaffirming to know that personal pain can be replaced with peace of mind. I hope that the product of this research will be inspirational to those who are just beginning their journey into developing a positive gay identity, and affirming to those who have already achieved it.
2. Counselling Practice - I believe that understanding the journey of gay men will add to the body of knowledge in counselling psychology. Their experience may provide insights into strategies for counselling gay men effectively.
3. Theoretical Significance - This research may add to our theoretical understanding of identity development generally, and gay identity specifically.
4. Social and Political - Understanding is often a precursor to acceptance. A question regarding "the experience of" something opens up the full gamut of that which constitutes an experience. For example, if we hear the story of a hurting child, the experience will be full of beliefs, symbols, fantasies, behaviors, and affect. Hearing of the experience will affect us by conjuring up our own memories of hurt, which in turn may produce empathy. Oppressed people liberate themselves by first having a voice that others can understand. Perhaps my dissertation will be experienced as providing another voice.

Definition of Terms

The terms I will define here includes *"experience," "construct," "integrate," "positive," "homosexual," "gay,"* and *"identity."* The construct *"positive gay identity"* will be defined by myself and each of the co-researchers in chapter four. I will use Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary's (1996) definition for the first four terms. *Experience* means "direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge" (p. 409, 1a). *Construct* means "to make or form by combining or arranging parts or elements" (p. 248, 1). *Integrate* means "to form, coordinate, or blend into a functioning or unified whole" (p. 608, 1). *Positive* means "marked by or indicating acceptance, approval, or affirmation" (p. 909, 6a).

The terms *homosexual* and *gay* are sometimes used synonymously in the literature, and sometimes not (Cass, 1983-84). Even when they are used to mean different things, their particular definitions vary greatly. As the definitions of these words remain confounded for theoretical reasons, an extensive discussion of the problems of terminology will be reviewed in chapter two. Both words will be used in this dissertation as adjectives, but adjectives that mean different things. Whereas the word *homosexual* may be used to describe same-gender sexual experiences (e.g., "homosexual behavior"), feelings, or cognitions, it will also be used here to denote a sexual orientation whereby individuals are

> erotosexually attracted to and aroused by, and also falling in love with, only a person with the same sexual body morphology and external sexual anatomy as one's own. For such a person, the potential for a bisexual compromise is no greater than it is for the exclusively heterosexual person (Money, 1988, p. 105).

Also according to Money (1986, p. 104-105), "falling in love is not subject to voluntary control, as anyone who has been lovesick can readily attest to." Consequently, individuals do not have a choice over experiencing homosexual feelings or having a homosexual orientation.

The word gay, on the other hand, is an adjective that describes an identity status (APA, 1994), and identity is a word that implies choice. A gay person is an individual who has decided to self-identify as gay. Most of the time this will be because he or she has, at least primarily, a homosexual as opposed to a bisexual orientation. This may not always be the case, however, as Hart and Richardson (1981) have indicated. Some individuals may choose a gay identity as preferable to a heterosexual identity, despite their sexual orientation. A possible reason for doing this, they suggest, is "being able to socialize in an atmosphere of reduced gender-role demands and expectations" (p. 2). I suspect such a stance to be extremely rare, and in fact I have not seen any reference to this in the literature.

Like many psychological constructs, the term *identity* evokes many definitions by different writers. Hetrick and Martin (1984) consider it a broad category that is often separated into two subtypes: personal identity and social identity.

> Personal identity can be defined both as the sense of one's ongoing uniqueness as an individual and the intrapsychic process that support that sense (p. 3). . . Social identity relates more to the society's expectations of the individual in his or her role, . . . (p. 4).

Baumeister (1986, p. 4) defines identity as "a definition, an interpretation, of the self." Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1996, p. 575, 2a) defines it as "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual." A definition from a recent applied psychology textbook (Weiten, Lloyd, & Lashley, 1991, p. 491) defines identity as "having a relatively clear and stable sense of who one is and what one stands for."

Troiden (1984-85) wrote about the need to reach conceptual clarity in defining "self," "self-concept," "identity," and "homosexual identity." He prefers to use the term "self-concept" to denote what most psychologists think of when they define identity. Self-concept "refers to people's mental images of themselves: what they think they are like as people" (Troiden, 1993, p. 193). Identity, in Troiden's view, refers to aspects of self referenced to a particular social group (eg., "dentist" identity, "spouse" identity). The various identities are thus a subset of the broader category of self-concept.

Cass' (1983-84) definition of *identity* will be adopted in this dissertation, which is similar to Troiden's:

> Identity refers to organized sets of self-perceptions and attached feelings that an individual holds about self regarding some social category. It represents the synthesis of own self-perceptions with views of the self perceived to be held by others. Where self-perceptions and imagined others' views of self are in accord, then identity may be said to have developed" (p. 110).

Consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective (Troiden, 1984-85), identity thus requires reference to a specific social group or social setting. Before the modern gay liberation movement, I will argue in chapter two that there was no such thing as "gay identity," while acknowledging that people with a homosexual orientation have always existed.

CHAPTER TWO:

Review of the Literature

> *But it is love that makes us know who we are. And let no individual, no organization, and no institution try to take that away!*
>
> *(Isay, 1996, p. 175).*

Preparing the Literature Review

The Data Bases

The following data bases were utilized in generating a list of potentially relevant articles and books:

1. In May 1995, I requested a proquest search and a dialog search from a research librarian at Mount Royal College, Calgary, Alberta. The terms *identity, self-esteem, self-validation*, or *self-acceptance* and *gay, lesbian, homosexual*, or *homosexuality* were cross-indexed. The proquest search covered the years 1990 through 1995, while the dialog search included Eric (1980+), Social Sciences Search (1980+), PsychInfo (1980+), Dissertation Abstractions Online (1970+), Sociological Abstracts (1980+), Mental Health Abstracts (1980+), and the Academic Index (1990+).
2. In November 1995, I requested a dialog search from a research librarian at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, and she searched for the term *gay identity* under Dissertation Abstracts (1861+), PsychInfo (1967+), and Mental Health Abstracts (1969+).
3. Also in November 1995, I conducted my own computer searches at the University of Alberta using the key terms *gay identity* in "Infogate," which covers books and chapters of books within the university library collection. I also performed periodical abstract searches as follows: Eric (1984 to September 1995) with the terms *homosexuality, sexual identity, self concept* and *identification (psychology)* indexed with each other. In PsychInfo (1984 to November 1995), the terms *male homosexuality, self concept*, and *ego identity* were indexed with each other.

4. I conducted an additional computer search in November 1997 to update my references secured to date. In PsychInfo (1995 to November 1997), I used the terms *male homosexuality, homosexuality (attitudes toward), self concept, gender identity,* and *personality development* indexed with each other. In Eric (1995 to August 1997), I used the terms *homosexuality, sexual identity, self concept,* and *identification (psychology)* indexed with each other. Lastly, I used the Sociofile data base (1995 to 1997) and cross-indexed the terms *gay, identity, and language=english* with each other, and *homosexuality* and *self concept* together.
5. I have also maintained an active subscription to the Journal of Homosexuality since volume 30, number 1, 1995, and I recently perused all issues searching for articles directly related to my area of study.

The Strategy

The lists of articles and books generated from the data bases were quite extensive. I carefully reviewed each abstract for content that seemed relevant to my topic. After securing a copy of each identified article and book, I read them and added further references to my list as I proceeded. The final reference list is quite lengthy and I believe it represents a thorough review concerning the topic of positive gay identity.

Problems in Conducting Gay Research

I first became aware that there were some intrinsic problems in the literature on homosexuality when I tried to find answers to the *easy* questions. How many of us, for example, have wondered what percent of the population identifies as gay? On the surface, it sounds like a fair question. Unfortunately, there is no *fair* answer to it. The reader may be as alarmed as I was to discover that the answer ranges anywhere from 4% to 17% (Gonsiorek, Sell, & Weinrich, 1995)! Gonsiorek (1982b, p. 376) stated that "it is not possible to make noteworthy statements about homosexuality in general given the problematic state of the literature." In spite of his warning, we continue to hear global statements about gay people that, in my estimation, only serve to either feed the present stereotypes, or generate new ones. The following problems emerge regarding research in homosexuality and gay studies: (1) problems of definition; (2)

sample selection; (3) guarded disclosure; (4) diversity; and (5) heterosexual bias. Let me explain.

Morin (1977) found that researchers used primarily three different definitions of homosexuality in their studies: presence of same-sex behavior, erotic desire for the same-sex, and self-identification as homosexual. De Monteflores and Schultz (1978) added a fourth definition concerning the distinction between *gay* and *homosexual*. Richardson (1981) concluded that most studies had overemphasized sexual acts as their basis for homosexual inclusion, thereby contributing to an overly sexualized view of homosexual men and women. Whichever definition a researcher utilizes will have a dramatic impact on the results. For example, if we try to answer the above question regarding the percent of the population that is gay using varied definitions, the answer will be equally varied.

Using statistics from Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin's (1948) classic work on male homosexuality, 37% of the adult male population had sexual relations with another male to the point of orgasm at least once between adolescence and old age, 50% had experienced homosexual behavior or homosexual fantasies, and about 4% were exclusively homosexual in their behaviors and fantasies throughout adult life. Kinsey's work was only concerned with actual sexual behavior and sexual fantasies. If we included self-identification as either gay or homosexual as another criteria, the numbers would again need to be adjusted.

A number of writers have written about the confounding effects of having many bisexual individuals in their samples (Zinik, 1985; De Cecco, 1981; MacDonald, 1983). Zinik (1985) remarked that often individuals with more than incidental homosexual experience were included in samples of homosexuals, despite the amount of their heterosexual experience. MacDonald (1983, p. 100) indicated that "it is no longer legitimate to identify a person as a homosexual simply on the basis of *any* homosexual experience."

Besides deciding upon a definition, the question of what measures one uses are also problematic (Gonsiorek, 1982b). The choices have been verbal self-report, written self-report, self-rating scales, and physiological measures of pupil dilation and penile engorgement. Each measure will produce divergent results.

The second problem in the research involves sample selection. Many gay people are either hidden (Morin, 1977) or "invisible" (Bigner & Bozett, 1989; Morin, 1977), meaning that they are not publicly accessible to researchers. Consequently, any statistics or generalizations are biased toward those who are available to researchers, whom are generally individuals more open than the average (Shallenberger, 1996). Some evidence even suggests that those gay persons who volunteer for psychological research are less well-adjusted and extroverted than those who chose not to participate (Burdick & Stewart, 1974, cited in Gonsiorek, Sell, & Weinrich, 1995). Other criticisms involving research involving the visible members of the gay community are that the studies predominantly include young, white participants with advanced education (Eliason, 1996; Rothblum, 1994b).

The problem with sample selection is still further compounded by where samples are drawn (Gonsiorek, 1982b). Traditionally, males were recruited from gay bars or from clinical settings. Regarding gay bars, patrons tend to be younger, extroverted, users of alcohol and/or other drugs, and they tend not to be in coupled relationships. Estimates also suggest that only 10-to-25% of the gay community frequent these establishments with any regularity (Gonsiorek, 1982b). Derived from clinical settings, the skew will be toward those with significant emotional problems and/or problems in accepting their homosexual inclinations (Gonsiorek, 1982b).

The third problem in the literature is guarded disclosure. Even if one is open enough to take part in research on homosexuality, there is a risk involved in self-disclosure, particularly if one does not feel that complete anonymity is assured (Gonsiorek, Sell, & Weinrich, 1995). Face-to-face interviews, for example, particularly those done on a door-to-door basis, invite underreporting. Sexual information has a "high probability of being self-incriminating" (Money, 1988, p. 107). As Catania, McDermott, and Pollack (1986) have suggested, it appears safer to report on sexual practices you have not done, as compared to those you have experienced. The more potentially embarrassing the act, the less likely you will report it honestly.

The fourth problem I mentioned in the literature is diversity. Bell and Weinberg (1978) concluded that the gay community is extremely diverse. It is as diverse as the heterosexual community. Consequently, researchers need to specify the race, sex, age, and sometimes educational level of their samples before making any kinds of generalizations (Bell & Weinberg, 1978). In my view, even this is insufficient. The geographical location and time that the research was undertaken are also crucial. Using Bell and Weinberg's (1978) research as an example, they studied over 600 homosexual males and nearly 300 homosexual females during the early 1970s in the San Francisco Bay area. The average numbers of sexual partners and sexual practices reported then has decreased since recognition of HIV infection in the early 1980s (Seidman & Rieder, 1994). Beyond changes over time, I would postulate that being a gay person in the San Francisco Bay area is experienced as considerably more liberal than living in a conservative province like Alberta. Likewise, one may suspect that life in rural or small urban centres would be experienced differently from life in larger urban cities. All these factors need to be considered when attempting to interpret the literature on homosexuality.

The last problem in the literature I will discuss is *heterosexual bias*.[5] Morin (1977) reviewed most of the articles cited in Psychological Abstracts from 1967 through 1974 that dealt with homosexuality. This research would have occurred before homosexuality was declassified as a mental disorder. He categorized the 139 articles into five general content areas with the following percentage of articles classified into each domain: (1) Assessment/Diagnosis (16%); (2) Causes (30%); (3) Adjustment (27%); (4) Special Topics (20%); and (5) Attitudes toward Homosexuality (8%). Morin (1977) concluded that the research was negatively biased against homosexuals, given that the first three content areas, equalling 73% of the articles, reflect a psychopathology model.

Watters (1986) repeated Morin's study, focusing on the years 1979 through 1983. Using the same five content areas, he found 1%, 15%, 9%, 56%, and 19%, of the articles, respectively, fit into Morin's taxonomy. The 73% of articles found in the first three content areas in Morin's study had now been reduced to 29% in Watters' follow-up. Watters (1986) concluded that the heterosexual bias found in earlier studies had been dramatically reduced.

Beyond a taxonomy of articles, heterosexism is something felt within the person, whether that be the researcher or the individuals whom he or she is studying. Heterosexism will influence the researcher's perspective, as will its absence. For example, Nicolosi (1991) makes it clear in his book that he continues to see homosexuality as a pathological condition that is subject to "cure." Haldeman (1994), on the other hand, reviewed the research on *reparative*[6] therapy and concluded that none of the efforts reported in the literature have demonstrated their effectiveness. Heterosexist bias will influence the perception of the data at hand. Unfortunately, few writers are as honest as Nicolosi (1991) in reporting their bias up front.

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[5] *Heterosexism* is the belief that "heterosexuality is more natural than and superior to lesbian and gay life-styles" (Buhrke, 1989, p. 77). Often heterosexism is less obvious than homophobia. For example, most parents covertly expect that their children will mature and later couple with a member of the opposite gender (Blumenfield & Raymond, 1993).

[6] *Reparative* therapy, and "conversion" therapy as it is sometimes called, refers to all attempts made to change a person's sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual.

The Theoretical "Hot Bed": Sexual Orientation and Gay Identity

. . . so I've stopped asking the easy questions, for now at least. As I searched more deeply to get a handle on the topic of gay identity, I came to appreciate that the world could not be divided into "sheep and goats" as Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) noted years ago. Is sexual orientation simply a matter of heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual, fixed early in life and remaining stable, or is our sexuality more fluid than that, changing and adaptable? What do we mean by sexual orientation?

Few researchers seem to agree on much of anything. Underlying the disparities found in the literature appear to be five important factors: (1) incongruency between definitions of sexual orientation; (2) confusion between sexual orientation and gay identity; (3) confusion between behavior and identity; (4) gender differences; and (5) theoretical debate regarding the causation and maintenance of sexual orientation and gay identities, called the "essentialist" and "social constructionist" perspectives.

I will begin by looking at the definitions of sexual orientation. Garnets and Kimmel (1993, p. 4) define sexual orientation as generally reflecting "the affectional-erotic attraction to same gender, other gender, or to both women and men." Money (1993) emphasizes falling in love as the definitive criteria. Bailey and Zucker (1995, p. 43) suggest that sexual orientation "refers to whether a person is more strongly aroused sexually by members of his or her own sex, the opposite sex, or both sexes." The publication manual of the American Psychological Association (1994, p. 51) indicates that "*sexual orientation* is not the same as *sexual preference*. In keeping with Guideline 2, *sexual orientation* currently is the preferred term and is to be used unless the implication of choice is intentional." Gonsiorek, Sell, and Weinrich (1995, p. 41) defend usage of the term *sexual orientation* over *sexual preference* as "erotic feelings are a basic part of an individual's psyche and established much earlier than conscious choice would indicate." Although most definitions of sexual orientation imply that there is no choice in its development or eventual status over time, others do not. For example, Minton and McDonald (1983-84, p. 91) define sexual orientation as "one of the roles that comprise personal identity."

Another example is presented by Stein (1997), who argues that sexual orientation is not a static state at all. He writes that "same-sex sexual desire occurs both in people who also have no heterosexual desire and in people who have strong heterosexual desire. It occurs for some people at one point in their lives and not at other points" (p. 83).

Shively, Jones, and De Cecco (1983-84) reviewed 228 articles from 47 different journals. They found that sexual orientation was conceptually defined in 28 of the studies and operationally defined in 168. They concluded that the wide divergence in the definitions of sexual orientation was "symptomatic of an underlying conceptual confusion" (p. 127). In an earlier article, Shively and De Cecco (1977) proposed a theoretical structure whereupon "sexual identity" consisted of four components: biological sex, gender identity, social sex-role, and sexual orientation. These are often confused in the literature.

Gender identity (i.e., one's conviction of being male or female, which is disparate in transgendered individuals) is usually established by the time a child begins to talk. Social sex-role is what we characteristically attribute to being "masculine" versus "feminine" behavior. Its development generally occurs between ages three and seven years. Sexual orientation, on the other hand, is thought by Shively and De Cecco (1977) to develop at around the same time as social sex-role, but not synonymously. They hypothesized that sexual orientation has two aspects: physical preference and affectional preference. They further recommended that a complete assessment of sexual orientation should include both behavior and fantasy, rated separately for homosexual affiliation and heterosexual affiliation. This was in contrast to Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin's (1948) seven-point likert scale which rated an individual on sexual behavior and erotic desire from zero (exclusively homosexual) through six (exclusively heterosexual). The single scale meant that an individual with equally strong hetero and homo behavior/desire would be rated the same as one with equally low hetero and homo behavior/desire. By having two scales, each rating is not provided at the expense of the other. De Cecco (1981) also suggested that beyond looking at sexual behavior, erotic fantasies, and interpersonal affection, historical changes over time should also be considered.

Money and Ehrhardt (1972, cited in Coleman, 1981-82) believed that the origins of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality were determined during the developmental period of late infancy and early childhood. Their belief was based on how well established gender identity and social sex-role are established by a young age. There is little evidence that these three aspects of sexual identity develop simultaneously, however (Coleman, 1981-82). We do not know when sexual orientation develops as it seems to require formal operational thought for it to be acknowledged by the individual. Petersen, Leffert, and Graham (1995) note that sexual orientation is not generally recognized until early adolescence.

The literature, often confusing sexual orientation with social sex-role and gender identity, suggests three theoretical models (Bailey & Zucker, 1995) regarding the relationship between these which can help in untangling the conceptual difficulties. In the first model, development begins with gender identity, followed by social sex-role, and then sexual orientation. The end state of psychosexual development in this model is thus sexual orientation. In the second model, the developmental sequence is reversed. Sexual orientation develops first, and then influences the development of social sex-roles. The third model is less concerned with the sequence of development of social sex-roles and sexual orientation and instead focuses on the hypothesis that they are both influenced by the same factors, such as prenatal sex hormones (Bailey & Zucker, 1995).

Beyond the problem of definition, another notable problem in research on sexual orientation is confusion between sexual orientation and gay identity. Rosario, Meyer-Bahlburg, Hunter, Exner, Gwadz, and Keller (1996) studied 76 lesbian/bisexual female youths and 80 gay/bisexual male youths, ages 14-21 years, recruited from organizations in New York City. They found that self-identification as lesbian, gay, or bisexual changed over time. For example, 32 of the 55 males who once thought they were bisexual now identified as either gay, *straight*[7], or other, and 16 of the 28 males who now believed they were bisexual, straight, or other earlier believed they were gay.

Some authors might argue that their sexual orientation has changed, thereby proving that sexual orientation changes like the wind. Gonsiorek (1982a) has stated that at present, we do not know about the stability of sexual orientation over time. For most people, however, sexual orientation appears to be a relatively stable aspect of personality (Baumrind, 1995).

I would argue that a more parsimonious explanation is that their *identity* has changed. We know that adolescence is a time of identity development, and identity requires a great deal of questioning and experimenting before consolidation can occur (Kroger, 1996). Malyon (1981. p. 324) wrote that "there are times when same-sex desires during adolescence do not indicate the presence of incipient homosexuality." Change is to be expected during adolescence.

The third factor that contributes to the confusion in the literature is that caused by equating sexual behavior with either sexual orientation or identity. Schafer (1976) indicated that every adult can have sexual feelings and attraction for members of either gender, although most have a clear preference for one sex over the other. Up to 20% of the American adult male population report having had a homosexual experience at some time in their lives, but most of these men would not self-identify as gay (Seidman & Rieder, 1994). Ross, Paulsen, and Stalstrom (1988) reported that around 40% of men and even a higher percentage of women have been sexually attracted to their same gender at some point in time. Again, most of these people do not go on to develop a gay identity. There is not a one-to-one relationship between sexual behavior and identity (Richardson, 1993). Same-sex behavior is common in prisons, for example, and again few of these individuals ever identify as gay (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1993; Harry, 1985).

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[7] *Straight* is a synonym for someone who identifies as having a heterosexual orientation.

The fourth point that creates confusion in the literature relates to gender differences in sexual orientation and gay identity. The literature has clearly established that a large percentage of lesbian women see their sexual orientation as a choice, which consequently may change over time (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Rothblum, 1994b; Risman & Schwartz, 1988; Golden, 1987; Faderman, 1984). Gay men, on the other hand, generally experience their sexual orientation as not a choice (Rothblum, 1994b; Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Kimmel, 1993), and theorists generally agree that for gay men, sexual orientation is immutable (Isay, 1996; Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Money, 1988, 1986; Harry, 1985).

Perhaps as a consequence of these findings, the process of identity development, and theories of identity formation, are different for gay men and lesbians (Cox & Gallois, 1996). There are other differences between how gay men and lesbians experience their sexuality (Friedman & Downey, 1994; Kimmel, 1993; de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978; Schafer, 1976), and many of these differences exist between men and women generally, despite their sexual orientation (Friedman & Downey, 1994; Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Cass, 1979). Nonetheless, many theorists have attempted to devise theories that explain gay identity acquisition for both males and females, which is a questionable practice given the above. These theories I will describe in a later section of this literature review.

Perhaps the greatest impact of gender differences occurs in the minds of theorists who attempt to explain the etiology or maintenance of sexual orientation and/or gay identity, which is the fifth factor I have identified that creates disparities and controversy in the literature. Due to the significance of this debate, I will begin the next section with this topic.

The Essentialist versus Social Constructionist Debate

As I wrote in chapter one, I am not particularly interested in the cause of homosexuality. I accept Money's (1988) perspective that its etiology is multidimensional. Furthermore, I oppose this line of inquiry because our history surrounding the nature-nurture controversy is generally pathology-oriented. For example, my readings have indicated that there is a paucity of research looking at the cause of heterosexuality. If we believe, as I do, that both orientations are equally valid and of equal importance, then why do we favor explaining the one over the other? The cause of homosexuality is a moot point. We will never prove the cause of it anyway because data cannot answer questions of epistomology (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). The essentialist-social constructionist debate is unresolvable. I present the two sides here because they do affect people's thinking about sexual orientation and what it means to be a gay person.

One of the confusions in reading about this area is whether the essentialists and the constructionists are always talking about the same thing. Sexual orientation is not always distinguished from identity. Plummer (1981, p. 95), for example, wrote that "essentialists differ from constructionists on the way people become homosexual." Is Plummer writing about how people develop a homosexual orientation, or on when they make a conscious choice to accept the label of being gay? He explains that essentialists believe that sexual orientation develops early in life through either biology or their psychodynamics, and that it stays with them and forms part of their "essence." He explains that the constructionists believe "becoming sexual is a question of understanding how people develop on a vast matrix of sexual and gender possibilities across time" (p. 95). The phrase *becoming sexual* is vague. Does this refer to sexual behavior, sexual orientation, or identity?

My summation of the literature suggests that most of the time, essentialists are referring only to the development of sexual orientation, while social constructionists are referring to both sexual orientation and gay identity. Harry's (1985) literature review revealed that essentialists are referring to sexual orientation while social constructionists are writing about the labels applied to sexual orientation. Therefore, he concluded they are not talking about the same thing. Proponents of the essentialist perspective (e.g., Isay, 1996; Murphy, 1992; Whitam, 1977) believe that we have a "real self" that has a homosexual substrate to it. Coming out as a gay person, then, is acknowledging that which lies deeply rooted in our psyche.

Proponents of the social constructionist perspective (e.g., Watney, 1994; Katz, 1990; Cass, 1983-84) believe that sexual orientation is a learned behavior, and that gay identity is socially created and maintained. "*Social constructionism* suggests that there is nothing 'real' about sexual orientation except a society's construction of it" (Gonsiorek, Sell, & Weinrich, 1995, p. 46). Generally, social constructionists rely on data concerning lesbian development to support their claims (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995), while essentialists rely on data concerning gay males for their support (Whitam, 1977). In this way, both can provide rather convincing arguments in favor of their position. Some writers, like Golden (1987), acknowledge the gender differences in the essentialist/constructionist debate.

The Meanings of Homosexuality Across History and Culture

Homosexual History and Culture in General

As I continued reading, I became increasingly obsessed with asking myself if there were always people with primarily homosexual orientations, and if so, was there also room for them to express it . . . a *gay identity* if you will. I turned to history and anthropology for answers, and this is what I found.

Ford and Beach (1951) were some of the first researchers to collect information on large numbers of societies throughout the world. They analyzed files that contained information on over 200 different societies. Of the 77 societies for which information was available on homosexuality, they found that homosexual behavior was considered normal or socially acceptable in about two-thirds of them, and only in one-third was it stigmatized.

Beard and Glickauf-Hughes (1994) and Morin and Rothblum (1991) stated that homosexual orientation has always existed in one form or another throughout history and that it is has been reported in all cultures, and in many nonhuman species as well. This is grossly overstated, however. Sexual behavior does not equal sexual orientation. Herdt (1988) has suggested that although homosexual behavior in humans is probably universal, "institutional forms of homosexual activity are not" (p. 39). There are many reasons why people engage in same-gender sexual behaviors. Throughout history and across cultures, homosexuality has not been construed in the same way most of us think who were raised in this culture. Ross, Paulsen, and Stalstrom (1988, p. 142-143) posited five major views of homosexuality:

> (1) homosexuality as it is concerned with procreational aspects of sex, (2) homosexuality as an indicator of social status (dominance-submission), (3) homosexuality as recreation (hedonistic sexuality), (4) homosexuality as an educational activity (mentoring), and (5) homosexuality as an emotional preference (affectional sexuality).

Where homosexuality has been seen through the lens of procreative sex, it has been condemned (Ross, Paulsen, & Stalstrom, 1988). Homosexual acts do not lead to insemination, and is therefore considered ineffectual, unnatural, and/or morally reprehensible. Even before Christianity evolved, the Jewish people believed this as procreation was one of their highest values.

As an example of the second view of homosexuality, certain societies have used homosexual acts to indicate higher status or to humiliate the "lesser" person. Egyptians regarded homosexual acts to be acceptable if one did not take the receptive role in anal intercourse. The receiver was the only one stigmatized. It was also common practice for Egyptians to sodomize their enemies who were defeated in battle (Ross, Paulsen, & Stalstrom, 1988).

Homosexuality as recreation has been a relatively common cultural practice. The literature abounds with descriptions of sexual relations between males for purposes of sexual release (Ross, Paulsen, & Stalstrom, 1988). Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin's (1948) major survey revealed that a third of the American males in their sample indicated having same-gendered sex to the point of orgasm at least once between adolescence and old age. In some cultures, like Samoa and Mexico (Ross, Paulsen, & Stalstrom, 1988), it is considerable acceptable for males to engage in sexual relations if they do not display cross-gender behavior (i.e., "feminine" gender sex-roles).

Other cultures have certainly felt fewer taboos about touch as compared to our own. For example, married and unmarried males in the Kaingang tribe of South America sleep with their legs and arms entangled, sometimes in groups of three of four. In a number of tribes, a standard greeting entails gently grabbing the penis of another, or cupping his testicles. In the Cashinahua tribe, friends may lie on hammocks and play with each other's genitals while conversing, although erections are considered inappropriate (DuBay, 1987).

Homosexuality as an educational activity is epitomized by the practices of the ancient Greeks. Most upper class Greek males in their early twenties took an adolescent boy to teach and train to be warriors. The relationship between them usually involved pederasty as well. This practice continued until the elder one, sometime after his 30th birthday, was expected to surrender this relationship for marriage to a woman. Interestingly, oral sex was apparently rare and viewed unfavorably (Percy, 1996).

In more recent times, other societies have also implemented homosexual practices into their "mentoring" relationships between men and boys. The Sambia of New Guinea were a rather remarkable example. Seven-to-ten-year-old boys were taken away from their mothers to live with the males to be initiated into manhood. This involved fellating the older boys and single men on a daily basis until they reached puberty, whereupon the roles reversed and they became the fellated. This practice continued until they eventually married. Their underlying belief was that semen contained the essential ingredients needed to induce puberty. In spite of this consuming practice, the final result was exclusive heterosexuality (DuBay, 1987). Beyond sexual development, this relationship with the older males was also intended for educational purposes (Ross, Paulsen, & Stalstrom, 1988).

Roscoe (1988) wrote about the Keraki of New Guinea where all youths were ritually sodomized by adult males during a one-year initiation. Similar to the Sambia, they believed that masculinity was passed onto the younger person, but via anal intercourse instead of oral administration.

Within the four views of homosexuality presented so far, it would be difficult to witness the emergence of a *gay identity* as a viable option. As Nicolosi (1991, p. 135) indicated, "even in societies where males are free to participate in homosexual activities, exclusive homosexuality is not sanctioned." In the first view, homosexuality is condemned as a practice which does not lead to procreation. In the second view, homosexuality is used to show power. In the third view, homosexual acts are for fun and not to be taken seriously. This view reduces homosexuality to behavior and nullifies its significance to those who view it as a deep part of their psyche or personality. In the fourth view, homosexual acts serve a specific purpose, and once the purpose has been fulfilled, the homosexual behavior is to cease and desist.

I argue that it is only in the fifth view of homosexuality which has allowed the emergence of a gay identity, that which looks upon homosexuality as an emotional preference. Ross, Paulsen, and Stalstrom (1988) separated this view into homosocial and homosexual components. The homosocial aspect is the acceptance of close affectional bonds between members of the same gender. The homosexual component incorporates the sexual acts which may coincide with the feelings. It is for this second component that gay people have fought.

The History of the North American Modern Gay Movement

My review below is decidedly short. There are many good references for those who desire a thorough review of gay history (Spencer, 1995; Miller, 1995; Marcus, 1992). My purpose here is to "set the stage" for the emergence of the construct now called *gay identity*.

D'Emilio (1993) and Kaiser (1994) argue that the outbreak of World War II led to the beginning of the American modern gay movement. The draft brought many men together, including those with homosexual inclinations and experience. Apparently many of them were amazed to find already established gay nightclubs in cities like Paris (Kaiser, 1994). Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin's (1948) publication was also instrumental in bringing about increased awareness. The nation was shocked to discover that homosexual behavior and desires were common with everyday sorts of people. In 1950, a small group of homosexual males formed the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles, the first organization to begin fighting for the emancipation of homosexual people. A branch in San Francisco was formed in 1953. The 1960s saw the civil rights movement increase in intensity, and the situation was ripe for what occurred on June 28, 1969. It was common practice for gay bars to be raided by the police, but on this particular Saturday evening, two days of violent confrontation occurred between patrons of the Stonewall Inn in New York City and the police. News of the riot were broadcast across the nation (Marcus, 1992). The Stonewall rebellion marked a turning point for gay people. It signified that gay individuals were no longer willing to resign themselves to abuse on a collective level. Gay organizations began to flourish, and more gay people became visible.

In the same year, 1969, homosexuality was removed from the criminal code of Canada (Lee, 1977). Lee (1977, p. 50) wrote that the manner in which our nation dealt with the emerging social change "often distinguishes revolutionary America from reformist Canada." As of 1995, antisodomy statutes stay on the books in 21-of-50 American states (D'Adesky & Harris, 1995).

Revolutionary changes began to occur in the fields of psychiatry and psychology as the gay movement gained momentum. In the first edition of the DSM, homosexuality was included as a sexual disorder, classified among the sociopathic disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1952). In the second edition of DSM (American Psychiatric Association, 1968), homosexuality was moved from the sociopathic disorders to a reclassification under sexual deviation. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association eliminated homosexuality as a mental disorder by a vote of 5,854 to 3,810 (Bayer, 1981). However, DSM-III maintained the diagnosis of "ego-dystonic homosexuality" (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) for those misfortunate individuals who were unhappy about their sexual orientation. Given the stereotypes of gay people that I will discuss in the next section, it is a small wonder that *every* gay person didn't receive this diagnosis!

In 1975, The American Psychological Association responded accordingly with its declaration that:

> homosexuality, per se, implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities; further, the American Psychological Association urges all mental-health professionals to take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with homosexual orientation (Conger, 1975, p. 633).

Similar changes to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) took even longer. ICD-9 continued to list homosexuality as a mental disorder (World Health Organization, 1980) and only in the most recent edition, ICD-10, has it been declassified (World Health Organization, 1992). This classification system has, however, maintained a diagnosis called "egodystonic sexual orientation" for anybody who wishes they weren't who they are.

Through all of the societal changes, a gay identity has emerged. As quoted from Cass (1983-84, 117):

> A *gay identity* "implies affiliation with the gay community in a cultural and sociable sense" (Warren, 1974, p. 149), and identifies those who have adopted a particular *world* view or perspective of reality which is *self-imposed* and a *self-defined* determinant of the attitudes, beliefs, actions, and even the vocabulary affecting human interactions" (Chesebro, 1981, p. 186).

For the first time in history, gay people have created their own sense of identity, and they have become visible. A *gay world* has developed, defined by Plummer (1981, p. 104) as referring

> to all those cultural forms which take male homosexuality as a key concern -- gay bars, discos, clubs, saunas and the like. In larger American cities, a wide range of institutions (from varied gay bars to baths, from varied churches to political organizations), a range of special scenes and maybe even a gay ghetto. .

The social construction of a gay identity, however, has not meant that the transition has been an easy one for either gay people or the society in which we live. Far from it, as the next section will attest.

The Hurt and the Healing: Reactions to a Gay Identity

In spite of significant changes to law and policy, gay individuals continue to suffer prejudice and discrimination (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1993). A recent example is the decision Friday, February 23, 1996 by the Alberta Court of Appeal which ruled that "the province's human rights laws do not have to include special protection for homosexuals" (Johnson, 1996). This appeal overruled an earlier decision concerning an instructor fired from a Christian college after officials learned he was gay.

Gay people are not a well-loved group. In fact, Unks (1995, p. 1) claims that "homosexuals are arguably the most hated group in the United States." There is plenty of evidence to support this claim. American surveys have estimated that half or more of lesbians and gay men have been either verbally harassed or physically assaulted (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995). In a study of more than 2,000 lesbians and gay men in eight American cities, Herek (1988) reported the results of the 1984 National Gay Task Force survey which found that more than 90% of the males and 75% of the females responded that they had been verbally harassed because of their sexuality. Furthermore, half the males and more than one-third of the females were threatened with physical violence, while one-fifth of the males and one-tenth of the females reported being physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation. Savin-Williams (1994) discussed results from six studies indicating that many *lesbigay*[8] youths report physical assaults from both family and peers.

The prejudice underlying these acts is shocking. Apparently many Americans "do not perceive it as wrong to physically or emotionally abuse gays" (Dempsey, 1994, p. 160). Dempsey also reported the results of a 1992 *Newsweek* poll which suggested that 53% of their respondents considered homosexuality unacceptable. A majority of respondents to a national poll in 1987 suggested that they would rather not have gay individuals as work associates (Friedman & Downey, 1994), and academic environments are still perceived as "relatively homophobic and unsupportive of lesbians and gay men" (Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, Hurley, & Ruprecht, 1992, p. 94). Negative attitudes toward homosexuality are particularly targeted at gay males as opposed to lesbians, and more strongly felt by heterosexual males than heterosexual females (Page & Yee, 1986). The worst thing you can call a man, according to both male and female college students, is a *"faggot"* (Preston & Stanley, 1987).

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[8] *Lesbigay* is a short-hand term used occasionally in the literature to collectively denote lesbians, gay males, and bisexuals.

The cost of homophobia and heterosexist thinking is staggering to our young people. These have been associated with school problems, running away, substance abuse, and prostitution (Savin-Williams, 1994). Available evidence suggests that gay male adolescents have a higher rate of attempted suicide than non-gay youth (Rotheram-Borus & Fernandez, 1995). Although once postulated that they also had an increased rate of completed suicide as well (Health Canada, 1994), recent research has not supported these projections (Shaffer, Fisher, Hicks, Parides, & Gould, 1995).

Although gay youth develop biologically and cognitively the same as heterosexuals, their development is emotionally and socially impaired (McFarland, 1993; Malyon, 1982b). Homosexual teenagers know they are different, and they commonly feel alienated and alone (Troiden, 1979). Whereas heterosexuals generally date first before experiencing sexual intimacy, the situation is generally reversed for gay youth (A. D. Martin, 1982; McFarland, 1993). This reversal is likely due to the unacceptability for youth to date others of the same gender. As young gay males turn to casual sex to find physical intimacy, they also increase their risk of contracting AIDS. Although adolescents represent only 2% of AIDS cases in the United States, their number has been doubling every 14 months (Brownsworth 1992 stats, cited in McFarland, 1993). Adolescents feel great turmoil in acquiring a gay identity (Russell, 1989), and they have great difficulty in seeing anything positive about being gay (Remafedi, 1987).

Can you blame them for feeling this way? The gay stereotypes do not describe the majority of gay people, but they thrive nonetheless with the uninformed. These stereotypes include such descriptors as "mentally ill, emotionally crippled, neurotic, sexually confused, promiscuous, unfulfilled, parentally fixated, unhappy, obsessed, lonely, depressed, incapable of relationships" (Dubay, 1987, p. 102), undependable, overly strong libidos, defective genes (Hart, 1981), narcissistic, shallow, overly critical of others (Beard & Glickauf-Hughes, 1994), effeminate, and overly talkative (Lee, 1977). The love of the color green is supposedly common with gay males (Paul, 1985). Hetrick and Martin (1984) provided some less commonly-held beliefs about gay people in their book. In the past, for example, homosexuals were blamed for destroying civilizations, a well-respected sexologist reported they could not "whistle," "they apparently lacked body hair, they caused the Second World War and the American defeat in Vietnam, they were child molesters, and they could not form mature non-sexual friendships with either sex. They also supposedly caused anorexia nervosa and crime in the streets (Hetrick & Martin, 1987).

Hetrick and Martin (1987, p. 32) reported some frequently-asked questions posed by homosexual youth at their gay youth outreach program in New York City:

> Does this mean I have to a hairdresser or something like that?"; "Will I start messing around with little kids?"; "Am I going to get AIDS?"; "The Pope hates homosexuals! How can I be queer?" They report that they are afraid they will be found out; that they want to run away because the pressures of hiding are too much; and perhaps most frighteningly, that they want to kill themselves rather than be a queer.

Even gay men and lesbians are subject to believing some of these stereotypes. Although a study by Saghir and Robins (1973, cited in Dunkle & Francis, 1996) revealed that 71% of the male homosexuals sampled and 44% of the female homosexuals believed they could recognize other gay people from their appearance, they were unable to distinguish pictures of homosexuals from heterosexuals beyond chance levels. A recent study by Dunkle and Francis (1996) revealed that both male and female undergraduates assigned higher homosexuality ratings to pictures of unattractive males and females compared to their attractive counterparts, suggesting that university students are still subject to stereotyping. In spite of the stereotypes that still exist, Bell and Weinberg (1978) conducted a large-scale study of homosexual men and women in the San Francisco Bay area which amply demonstrated that relatively few conformed to any of the stereotypes that people have of them.

The adult gay community has also suffered tremendously from homophobia and heterosexism. Many adults do not come out until they are in their thirties, and then suffer something akin to a "delayed adolescence" (Malyon, 1982a). This is analogous to being a teenager trapped inside an adult body. Sexual desire is no longer repressed, which itself can seem a bit overwhelming. Emotional development has been delayed as the establishment of gay relationships have not had the opportunity to develop. The awareness that their feelings are chronologically misplaced creates great psychic pain.

Kus (1988) provided evidence that not accepting one's gayness may be causally related to the high incidence of alcohol abuse and dependence witnessed in the gay community. It has been hypothesized that the more repressed homosexuality is, as in Mexican gay life for example, the more public sex occurs (Taylor, 1985). One study found that the main participants of public sex in washrooms were by married males (Humphrey's 1970 study, cited in A. D. Martin, 1982), which supports the hypothesis that public sex more likely occurs with individuals who repress and are in denial. Repression and denial are not difficult to understand when one considers the degree to which mainstream society has expressed its abhorrence of homosexuality (Herek, 1988; Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1993).

Although I have so far painted a rather bleak view for the future of gay individuals, there is a positive side to this narrative, however. The evidence supporting the mental health of gay individuals is volumous (e.g., Rothblum, 1994b; Brady & Busse, 1994; Leserman, DiSantostefano, Perkins, & Evans, 1994; Morin & Rothblum, 1991; Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990; Miranda & Storms, 1989; Ross, Paulsen, & Stalstrom, 1988; Schmidt & Kurdek, 1987; Watters, 1986; Haldeman, 1994; Gonsiorek, 1982b; Hammersmith & Weinberg, 1973; Weinberg, 1970; Chang & Block, 1960; Hooker, 1957). Gays do not differ significantly from straight individuals in their upbringing (A. D. Martin, 1982), and most gay men believe that they only differ from heterosexuals in their sexual behavior and preference (Troiden, 1979). Gay men generally value relationships more than casual sex (Connell, 1992), and comparable to heterosexuals, they are capable of establishing and maintaining meaningful long term relationships (Schmitt & Kurdek, 1987; Troiden, 1979; A. D. Martin, 1982).

Beyond coming out, the gay male goes through a process of change which may eventually result in the construction of a positive gay identity. Numerous developmental models have been advanced in the literature to look at the sequence of milestones that homosexuals encounter while forming a gay identity (Dank, 1971; Plummer, 1975; Lee, 1977; Hencken & O'Dowd, 1977; Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981-82; Minton & McDonald, 1983-84; Troiden, 1993; and McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). The next section will take a critical look at these developmental models, followed by a new model that is not a stage theory.

Models of Gay Identity Acquisition

Developmental Stage Models

The interest in developmental models to understand how individuals come to adopt a gay identity has been extensive and worthwhile. However, a criticism of stage theories is their assumption that development proceeds in a predictable manner, and an implicit assumption that development that does not proceed in the stated order is somewhat abnormal, atypical, or insufficient (Weinberg, 1984, referred to in Cox & Gallois, 1996, advances similar criticisms). Coleman (1987) criticizes all stage models because they assume a biological predisposition, they are subject to the researcher's own bias, the progression through the stages is invariant, they are generally built around gay male development, and they do not reflect the ever-changing state of human nature.

Gay individuals have often felt abnormal, atypical, and insufficient (i.e., inferior or inadequate) in coming to terms with their identity, and models of gay identity which unwittingly imply the same "lackingness" is unfortunate and destructive in my opinion. Subliminally, the message to gay persons is that they remain "not good enough." The stage theorists imply that once the highest level of their hierarchy of development has been attained, the person has attained "enlightenment." Perhaps each enlightenment only opens the door for the next revelation to occur. Where is the end point? Stage models artificially create one.

Eliason's (1996) global criticism of the developmental models is that they are overly focused on sexuality, they are based on small sample sizes, their linearity, and their lack of attention to the bigger picture (i.e., the sociohistorical context). They also "tend to 'minoritize' sexual identities" (p. 31). She also discusses the poststructuralist's impact in the area of gay identity. There is not one history of homosexuality, but many according to the poststructuralists. Further, there is not one gay identity either. Gay identity is fluid and everchanging.

Gay identity development is the process of progressing from an "assumed state of heterosexuality to an open, affirmed state of homosexuality" (Loiacano, 1993, p. 364). Garnets and Kimmel (1993) derived five central points from their review of stage models of gay identity formation: (1) initial awareness followed by a period of identity confusion; (2) reconciliation between one's gay identity and society's reaction is necessary; (3) variety of stigma management strategies used by gay people; (4) exploration into the gay subculture with subsequent socialization into their norms; and (5) increased desire to disclose gay identity to others over time. Although a linear progression is generally described by theorists, the data indicate that a horizontal spiral pattern may be more appropriate (see Troiden's, 1993, theory later in this section).

I will review the stage models by order in which they were published, beginning with the earliest one first. Where possible, I will also add either my criticisms or those provided by other reviewers.

Dank (1971)

Dank (1971) conducted both a qualitative and a quantitative study. The qualitative component consisted of lengthy 4-to-5 hour interviews with 55 self-admitted homosexuals to primarily understand their experience of "coming out," and secondarily to look at how they came to adopt a gay identity. The quantitative, statistical data reported was derived from the results of 182 one-page questionnaires. In Dank's theory, gay identity occurs in two stages: (1) identification, and (2) self-acceptance.

For identification to occur, the gay male must be placed into a new social framework. The everyday social world does little to educate males on how to be gay (especially 27 years ago), so the gay male needs to be exposed to gay thought through perhaps gay literature, gay friendships or acquaintances, well-informed heterosexuals, and so forth.

Self-acceptance does not occur for most gay males until they become able to change the meaning of the term *homosexual* to something more positive than its stereotypical definitions provided by naive straight society. For example, they do not want to be defined as queers, perverts, abominations, or any of many other negative labels. Dank writes that identification and self-acceptance usually occur together, but not always.

Dank (1971) has not indicated how his interview data was analyzed. What did he ask the participants over 4-to-5 hours? Were the questions already determined, or did data collection vary from one person to the next? Are two stages sufficient for acquiring a gay identity? Did everyone experience it the same way? As most of his article was concerned with coming out experiences, gay identity formation was likely not his primary focus. Nonetheless, Dank was possibly the first to theorize about how an individual comes to define himself as gay.

Plummer (1975)

Plummer's (1975) book was based on his PhD dissertation submitted to the University of London in 1973. Unfortunately, he does not indicate his methodology either, leaving this supposedly for those who secure a copy of his dissertation. His ideas likely result from interviews he conducted. Eliason (1996) criticizes his model for not providing empirical support for his theory. Plummer's theoretical perspective was symbolic interactionism, which postulates that people ascribe meaning to symbols, language, and gestures through their interaction with others. Consequently, gay identity would be viewed as a socially constructed phenomena.

Plummer suggests that some homosexuals go through the following stages in adopting a homosexual role: sensitization, signification, coming out, and stabilization. Sensitization occurs when an "actor" gains awareness of homosexual inclinations, generally through same-sex behavior, affect, or sexual fantasy. Signification begins when the individual develops a heightened awareness of homosexual identity. The question "who am I?" is a key question in this stage. Coming out marks the point at which a homosexual identity is adopted, and contact with other homosexuals is initiated. Plummer's description of stabilization is perhaps best summed-up by his phrase of "role imprisonment" (p. 152). His view is that the homosexual role becomes stabile due to sociological forces that keep the person defined as homosexual. A criticism of Plummer's theory is that the final step in his process is hardly a positive or celebrated function of self. It reads more like a punishment into eternal damnation.

Lee (1977)

Lee (1977), like Dank (1971) before him, wrote about indoctrination into the social reality of gays. His steps into gayhood are signification, coming out, and going public, with each of these steps broken into sub-steps. Signification was described as "a transition from 'primary' to 'secondary' deviance" (p. 52), whereby one begins to assume that one's behavior reflects something more enduring about one's personality (i.e., "maybe I'm gay," instead of "I enjoy sex with men, but I'm still straight"). Signification is broken down into four substeps: "secret" masturbation, anonymous sex, a long-term homosexual relationship, and the "*closet queen*"[9] status. The coming out stage includes self-identification as gay and disclosing to others. It has five substeps: adopting a tentative stance, walking into a gay bar with or without friends, disclosing to a few heterosexual friends, letting others knows within a restricted social network, and attending a gay organization. Lee's third stage, going public, involves being in the public limelight. He describes five aspects of this experience: making the decision, the cost of not doing it, the changes required in going public, the degrees of being public, and what it is like after going public. Lee noted that not everyone goes through every substep, and his third stage is one that few gay people freely choose.

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[9] The meaning of *closet queen* varies, but usually refers to someone who does not admit to being homosexual (Dank, 1971).

Lee's (1977) model is almost totally focused on behaviors experienced at each level, while ignoring the cognitive and affective domains. The hallmark of having a homosexual orientation, which underlies the coming-out experience for most gay people, is missing: the predisposition to and subsequent experience of falling in love with members of the same gender. Gay identity is reduced to that which occurs through specified behavioral experiences. No mention is made of how Lee arrived at his conclusions either. The methodology is again missing, other than the final stage of "going public" which was based on media analysis of 14 gays (including himself) and personal interviews with nine others.

Hencken and O'Dowd (1977)

In the same year, Hencken and O'Dowd (1977) had their theory published. Their article on "coming out" hypothesized three stages: (1) awareness; (2) behavioral acceptance; and (3) public identification. Once individuals move beyond awareness into acceptance, they become able to accept their feelings and are thus freed to act upon their desires. Hencken and O'Dowd suggested that public identification is the main thrust of gay activism. Their article encourages this last stage as they maintain that it will lead to interpersonal growth for gay individuals.

I doubt after reading Hencken and O'Dowd's (1977) article that they intended it to be used for theory building, although it is often referred to in the literature as one of the theories of gay identity formation (Minton & McDonald, 1983-84; McDonald, 1982; Coleman, 1981-82; Cass, 1979). I view their paper as mostly a "call to action" for gay people to step out and be counted. In other words, it is a call for political activism. Nonetheless, their first two stages are included in the works of other gay theorists, and their third stage, like Lee's (1977), is one that some gay people will ultimately chose.

Cass (1979)

Perhaps the most sophisticated model advanced in the literature, according to Cox and Gallois (1996), is that developed by Cass (1979). Cass (1979) developed a theoretical model of homosexual identity formation based on interpersonal congruency theory which was intended to apply to both female and male homosexuals. Brady and Busse (1994, p. 3) describe its main features:

> . . . change from a pre-homosexual to a homosexual identity occurs in response to the incongruence experienced by an individual when s/he confronts the following: (1) perceptions the individual holds about a characteristic attributed to him/herself (e.g., "I am homosexual," "I am heterosexual," and "I am bisexual"); (2) the individual's perceptions about his or her behavior (e.g., "My behavior may be homosexual"); and (3) the individual's beliefs about what people think about him or her (e.g., "Others think I'm heterosexual or bisexual").

Her six-stage model is based on clinical work with homosexuals over several years. An individual may choose not to go through the entire sequence of six stages of identity formation postulated, thereby becoming "foreclosed" at that stage.

The stages begin with *identity confusion* whereby actors label their behavior (defined in a global sense of either actual behavior, or inclusive of thoughts and emotions) as homosexual, which creates a deeper question of whether the actor is homosexual. "Who am I?" becomes the most salient question. Stage two, called *identity comparison*, focuses on the social alienation resulting from the actor feeling a lack of belonging. The actor is aware of feeling different from others, and the task of stage two is to deal with the social alienation that results.

In stage three, *identity tolerance*, the actor has moved toward a self-image more closely aligned with homosexual, expressed in the statement "I probably am a homosexual." At this stage the individual seeks out homosexuals and their subculture. Next, the actor may move on to *identity acceptance*, whereby he or she now accepts rather than simply tolerates a gay identity. Increased contact with other homosexuals occurs. In stage five, *identity pride*, the person feels a strong commitment to the gay community, and apparently seeks out other homosexuals as their only "true" companions. It is suggested that individuals at this stage view heterosexuals negatively, and homosexuals positively (expressed by Cass, 1979, as a " 'them and us' philosophy" - p. 234). I suspect that many gay individuals today would find this stage objectionable, and for the most part invalid. Although anger is often felt in overcoming heterosexist thinking and conditioning, the amount of generalization suggested by Cass (1979) is highly suspect. Sophie (1985-86) commented that the role of anger and pride in Cass' (1979) theory is a reflection of the importance of historical changes that have occurred in the gay liberation movement.

Stage six results in *identity synthesis*. Gayness becomes viewed as only one part of identity. The actor is again able to see both homosexuals and heterosexuals as individuals. Cass (1983-84) reiterated her stance that identity formation is not complete until this stage is attained.

Eliason (1996) criticizes Cass's model in that research has shown that not all women pass through the stages, or in the order specified. Furthermore, her last stage of identity synthesis suggests that one's gay identity becomes less important in relation to other personal identities. Eliason (1996) asks if this means that those who are gay activists, who likely emphasize their gay identities, are deficient or stuck at an earlier level of gay identity development?

Whereas most theorists have not tested their models, Cass (1984) provided some empirical support for her model. Eliason (1996) concluded that Cass' theory is the most extensively studied of all the models found in the literature, and Zera (1992) credits it as the model from which others have originated. Recently, the Gay Identity Questionnaire (Brady & Busse, 1994) was constructed with Cass' model providing the theoretical base.

Coleman (1981-82)

Coleman (1981-82) advanced her theory of five stages: pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, first relationships, and identity integration. No data was provided in support of the theory. The model postulates that identity integration requires satisfactory completion of the previous stages (like most stage theories). The pre-coming out stage is analogous to the sensitization stage of Plummer (1975), while the coming out stage is similar to his signification stage. The exploration stage is comparable to Plummer's (1975) and Lee's (1977) coming out stage. Her first relationship stage involves learning how to function in a same-sex relationship within a society that is largely non-supportive. Lastly, identity integration is comparable to Cass' (1979) identity synthesis stage. Coleman indicates that not everyone reaches this final stage of integration.

Minton and McDonald (1983-84)

Subscribing to a symbolic interactionist perspective and using a theory of ego development developed by Habermas, Minton and McDonald (1983-84) suggested four stages of gay identity development: symbiotic, egocentric, sociocentric, and universalistic. The individual is in the symbiotic stage before having awareness of homosexual inclinations. The egocentric stage is comparable to the concept of sensitization in Plummer's (1975) theory. It represents the first inkling of homosexual awareness. The sociocentric stage is analogous to the signification stage in Plummer's (1975) and Lee's (1977) theory. The individual has now gained a heightened awareness of being homosexual and of society's condemnation toward this role. The universalistic stage is where the person accepts himself as homosexual and makes a commitment to that identity. It is broken down into three substeps: (1) identity acceptance; (2) identity commitment; and (3) identity integration.

Eliason's (1996) criticism of Minton and McDonald's theory is they did not provide empirical support for their model. More importantly, she argues that their use of Habermas' theory, which was developed for childhood and adolescent development, is inappropriate due to the differences in cognitive ability between children and adults.

Troiden (1993)

Troiden (1993) revised his earlier work (Troiden, 1979) in response to insights provided by Cass (1979; 1984) and another researcher, Barbara Ponse. Troiden (1979) interviewed 150 homosexuals in arriving at his theory of gay identity acquisition. His model prescribes four stages: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment.

Unlike most models, Troiden does not view his theory as linear. Instead, he hypothesizes that gay identity acquisition occurs within a "horizontal spiral, like a spring lying on its side" (Troiden, 1993, p. 195). Progress through the stages is up and down, back and forth, through the spiral. The stages may overlap and recur for some people.

Homosexual identity formation is considered emergent. Due to movement through the figurative spiral, identity development is rarely static. Changes, however subtle, are expected throughout one's life.

The framework for Troiden's theory is symbolic interactionism (Eliason, 1996). Consequently, the theory implies that a gay identity cannot be obtained without reference to either gay individuals or at least some form of media that exposes the individual to gay doctrines.

The first stage in the model is *sensitization*. This stage occurs before puberty. The child becomes sensitized to feelings of marginality, and perceptions that he is different from his peers. An impressive amount of research supports this claim (Troiden, 1993), although the research is based on reflections of gay individuals remembering their early years (as contrasted to longitudinal designs which would study children's perceptions and relate them to their later development).

Stage two is *identity confusion*. The thought that one might be homosexual is dissonant with one's socialization and self-image. This dissonance leads to inner turmoil and anxiety regarding one's sexual identity. According to earlier research by Troiden, the average age for coming to suspect that one is homosexual is around seventeen. Several factors account for the identity confusion experienced in this stage: "a) altered perceptions of self; b) the experience of heterosexual and homosexual arousal and behavior; c) the stigma surrounding homosexuality; and d) inaccurate knowledge about homosexuals and homosexuality" (Troiden, 1993, p. 199-200).

Identity confusion is generally responded to by gays through a number of strategies: denial, repair, avoidance, redefinition, and/or acceptance. Repair means attempts made to alter one's homoaffiliative disposition (e.g., reparative therapy). Redefinition involves attempts made to rationalize homoaffiliative affects, behaviors, or cognitions (e.g., "I only did it as an experiment"). Individuals can continue utilizing denial, repair, avoidance, or redefinition for years, thus deferring the integration of identity which begins with acceptance, and resulting progression to the next stage.

Stage three is *identity assumption*. This occurs either during or anytime after late adolescence. The hallmark of this stage is self-definition as a homosexual. As the stage also includes identity tolerance and acceptance (acceptance occurs later in this stage), I suggest that this is the stage at which the term "gay" begins to appropriately apply to an individual's identity. On the average, this stage is entered between ages nineteen and twenty-one (Troiden, 1979), and may occur shortly before or after having first social contact with other gay individuals. According to Cass (1979), the quality of this initial contact with other gay people is very important; negative contact may lead the person back into the earlier stage with reliance upon denial, repair, avoidance, or redefinition.

Beyond the internal proclamation of adopting a gay identity lies the individual's interaction with his society. Since announcing one's gayness will not elicit bouquets from most people, gay persons learn ways to manage their stigma. According to Humphrey (1972, cited in Troiden, 1993), gay individuals will adopt one of four stigma management strategies: *capitulation*, *minstrelization*, *passing*, and *group alignment*.

Those who *capitulate* avoid homosexual activity. They do so because they have internalized the stigma. Unfortunately, this strategy may lead to self-hatred and despair.

Those who *minstrelize* behave in a manner consistent with the common stereotypes of gay men. For example, they may dress or act in a way that appears effeminate. Unlike capitulaters, minsterlizers want others to know they are gay, and do so by trying to be obvious.

Passing is the most common strategy, and involves attempting to go unnoticed as anything other than a heterosexual. Passers, although out to themselves, go to great lengths to conceal their identities from significant others. This requires that they lead "dual lives," keeping their homosexual lifestyle divorced from their heterosexual facade.

Group alignment entails the strategy of "belonging" to the gay subculture by getting involved in their group activities, whether it is politically, socially, or recreationally based. Other homosexuals are looked to for emotional and social support, and the resulting sense of belonging reduces the pain associated with the stigma.

The final, fourth stage is *commitment*. "In the homosexual context, *commitment* involves adopting homosexuality as a way of life" (Troiden, 1993, p. 208). This stage suggests that the individual has fully rejected heterosexuality, and has made a commitment to be gay. A number of internal and external dimensions characterize this stage:

> It is indicated *internally* by: a) the fusion of sexuality and emotionality into a significant whole; b) a shift in the meanings attached to homosexual identities; c) a perception of the homosexual identity as a valid self-identity; d) expressed satisfaction with the homosexual identity; and e) increased happiness after self-defining as homosexual. It is indicated *externally* by: a) same-sex love relationships; b) disclosure of the homosexual identity to nonhomosexual audiences; and c) a shift in the type of stigma-management strategies (Troiden, 1993, p. 208).

The shift in the type of stigma-management strategies alluded to in the above quote refers to three new strategies that generally replace passing and group alignment: covering, blending, or converting. Men who *cover* readily admit that they are gay, but they nonetheless attempt to keep their identities hidden. Those who *blend* see their gay identities as unrelated to their activities within straight culture, and would be inclined to say, if asked about their sexual orientations, something like "What's it to you?" Gay men who *convert* adopt a world view that destigmatizes homosexuality. Gayness becomes transformed from a vice into a virtue. Men who convert are proud to be gay, and open about it with virtually everyone who cares to listen.

Troiden postulates that entering a same-sex love relationship marks the onset of his final stage, identity commitment. I disagree with Troiden's theory regarding this point. There are many heterosexuals who chose not to engage in an opposite-sexed relationship, and yet no one argues that they have a commitment to being "straight." Similarly, there are gay individuals as well who either refrain from, or have difficulty, establishing same-sex love relationships. This avoidance or inability to engage someone erotically is not a prerequisite for these individuals to feel a strong affinity to their self-definition as gay. The hallmark of sexual orientation which underlies a gay identity is not sexual activity, but the direction of one's eroticism and affiliation. Eliason (1996, p. 50) has criticized his theory as it "proposes that people are only 'homosexual' in a romantic or sexual social context, which contradicts other research indicating that homosexuality is a way of life for some people."

McCarn and Fassinger (1996)

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) developed what they consider to be an inclusive model of identity formation for sexual minorities. The model was originally validated on lesbians (McCarn and Fassinger, 1996) and was demonstrated to have validity with 34 gay men using a Q-sort methodology (Fassinger & Miller, 1996).

They criticized existing models as having ignored the difference between the development of personal identity and social identity. Furthermore, they argued that existing models had confounded these two identities by not separating their developmental sequences. McCarn and Fassinger (1996) suggested that gay/lesbian development requires not only the formation of a personal identity, but that the development of a group membership identity involving the "confrontation of oppression and acceptance of one's status as a member of an oppressed reference group" (Fassinger & Miller, 1996, p. 55) also occurs simultaneously.

Individual sexual identity and *group membership identity* (their names for these identities) develop in their model within four phases: awareness, exploration, deepening-commitment, and internalization-synthesis. In the development of individual sexual identity, the awareness phase is characterized by feeling or being different. Exploration involves having strong feelings or attraction for someone of the same gender. The deepening-commitment stage finds individuals developing a crystallized sense of their sexuality, and the internalization-synthesis stage is completed when individuals have integrated their love for members of the same gender into their overall identity.

The progression for developing group membership identity within the four phases begins with becoming aware that people develop different sexual orientations (*awareness*). The next step is learning about the attitudes of gay people and what it means to belong to the gay community (*exploration*). From here, individuals become personally involved with a reference group within the gay world and become increasingly aware of oppression (*deepening-commitment*). Lastly, they come to view themselves as part of a minority group across different contexts (*internalization-synthesis*).

In reviewing McCarn and Fassinger's model, I concur that the dual emphasis of considering the development of personal identity alongside social identity is an improvement over earlier developmental theories. The authors have also provided some empirical support for their theory, in so much as a Q-sort verifies if other individuals concur with one's designation of content into certain categories.

Fassinger and Miller (1996, p. 53) suggest that the theory advances "a new, inclusive model of sexual minority identity formation." Gay men and lesbian women are not the only sexual minorities, however, and perhaps time will tell if their theory can also appropriately be applied to bisexuals and transgendered individuals.

Summary of the Stage Models

Most of the stage models follow a similar progression of development. Sophie (1985-86) summarized the stage models as generally progressing through four main stages: (1) awareness of homosexual feelings; (2) testing and exploration without self-identification as gay; (3) adoption of a gay identity (i.e., identity acceptance), and (4) identity integration. These stages emphasize the content within each developmental sequence. Loicano (1989) offered her content analysis and also arrived at four stages, albeit somewhat different from Sophie's: (1) a sense of feeling different; (2) awareness of homosexual feelings; (3) a crisis point in which the person acknowledges his or her feelings are homosexual; and (4) acceptance and integration of a gay identity. Minton and McDonald (1983-84) concluded that the various theories together can be collapsed into three developmental stages of identity development: (1) interpreting feelings as homoerotic; (2) internalizing the negative misconceptions and stereotypes regarding homosexuality; and (3) challenging these negative beliefs, and discarding them in favor of a positive gay identity. Cass (1984) conceptualized the **process** through the stages as characterized by: (1) gradually accepting the label "gay"; (2) developing a positive attitude toward the label; (3) growing desire to disclose the label; and (4) increasing contact with other gay people.

To date, neither of these stage theories have been rigorously tested. As I mentioned earlier, however, Cass (1984) tested her theory and found some support for it, although four stages could have described the results as well as her postulated six.

A Non-Stage Model of Gay Identity Acquisition

Cox and Gallois (1996) argue that the developmental models do not consider social factors sufficiently in explaining gay identity acquisition. They advance a social psychological perspective called *social identity theory*. According to Weinberg (1984, cited in Cox & Gallois, 1996), developmental theorists are limited in their overemphasis on linear thinking, suggesting that there is only one way to achieve a gay identity. He suggested that there may be multiple paths toward achieving many different gay identities, and that each may have a different starting point. Furthermore, Cox and Gallois (1996) suggest that developing a gay identity involves becoming a part of a stigmatized minority as much as it involves developing an individual identity.

"Social identity theory is concerned with social influences in the development of the self-concept and the derivation of positive self-esteem contingent upon it" (Cox & Gallois, 1996, p. 10). The theory postulates two underlying processes: *self-categorization* and *social comparison*. Self-categorization includes both self-identification as gay and a gradual adoption of the norms, values, and ideals of the larger gay community. Thus, individuals have both a personal identity and a social identity, and they aspire toward a place of viewing each identity positively.

Self-esteem is largely contingent upon the second process hypothesized in the theory (i.e., social comparison). Once individuals label themselves as gay, they are motivated to perceive the homosexual group they align themselves with in a positive light. As contrasted to developmental theories which emphasize content of each stage, social identity theory focuses on the process of identity acquisition.

Cox and Gallois (1996, p. 27) suggest that "to attain a positive gay identity, categorization and comparison processes are of fundamental importance." The two processes by which individuals attain a positive personal identity are social mobility and social change. Social mobility is explained through Humphrey's four strategies of managing stigma described earlier under Troiden's (1993) theory: capitulating, passing, covering, and blending. Four forms of social change are also suggested, three of which collectively are called "social creativity" with the remaining one called "social competition." Social creativity includes: (1) finding new bases by which to make comparisons to the dominant group (i.e., heterosexuals); (2) changing the value attached to existing comparisons; and (3) finding new groups by which to make comparisons (e.g., comparing oneself to subgroups within the gay world instead of heterosexuals).

The authors argue that neither of these strategies effect real change, and for that to happen requires their fourth strategy of social competition. This means that both the subordinate group and the dominant group accept the perceived change in social status. The example they provide is through social protests, like street marches.

My criticism of this theory is that although it claims to focus on process more than content, it does not provide a process or understanding of why individuals are motivated to self-identify as gay to begin with. While the social processes are explained, the theory seems deficient on the more internal psychological processes. Similar to most other theorists, Cox and Gallois (1996) have not provided empirical support for their theory.

In Search of Positive Gay Identity

As I pondered over the results of my literature search, I realized that a lot had been written about the coming out (i.e., self-identification) process, amply described by the gay identity theorists. Futhermore, a plethora of research exists in the areas of self-disclosure of one's gay identity, which I will mention later. The question that still seemed vague and unclear to me concerned what it meant to develop a positive gay identity. As I mulled over this, I kept vascillating between considering my own development as a gay person, and the development of other gay men that I have met. My intuition was telling me that the journey out of stigma has affected us deeply, and many are still struggling, and some stuck, in moving to a better psychological place.

Using Maslow's (1968, 1970) terminology, how does a gay man become self-actualized? What would characterize a self-actualized gay man? What would his experience be in getting there? Obviously, this dissertation could not answer all these questions, and a choice had to be made that personally generated the most passion. My research question looks at the experience of men who construct and integrate a positive gay identity. Minton and McDonald (1983-84) summarized that this is the final stage suggested by the various theorists, but not everyone attains this level. Coleman (1981-82) noted two studies, the first of which revealed that 15% of the male sample did not consider themselves to have a positive identity. In the other study, a sample of psychologists revealed that 8% of the females and 12% of the males had not achieved a positive gay identity.

A positive gay identity, when it develops, occurs sometime after self-identifying as gay. It represents the highest level of identity development and integration for a gay individual (Minton & McDonald, 1983-84). Consequently, I will review the highest level(s) of development within the gay identity theories previously outlined, beginning where gay persons become accepting of their identities as hypothesized by the theorists.

Gay Identity Theorist's Contributions to Positive Gay Identity

Dank's (1971) highest step takes us to the stage of *self-acceptance* and occurs once the individual changes the meaning of the term *homosexual* to something more positive. The final stage in Plummer's (1975) theory was called *stabilization*, whereby the gay person becomes "imprisoned" in the social role of "homosexual." In the third stage of Lee's (1977) model, *coming out* implies that self-acceptance has occurred, and his fourth stage of *going public* is not one that most gay people chose. Similarly, Hencken and O'Dowd (1977) suggest that *behavioral acceptance* occurs in stage two, followed by *public identification*, which they encourage.

In Cass' (1979) theory, positive gay identity begins at stage four (*identity acceptance*), with further developments at stage five (*identity pride*) and stage six (*identity synthesis*). According to her theory, the highest level suggests that individuals have now integrated their identities, with one's gay identity becoming only one part of their personal identity. Stage four in Coleman's (1981-82) theory, *first relationships*, implies that a positive acceptance of one's gay identity has occurred, and this is followed by *identity integration* at stage five.

In Minton and McDonald's (1983-84) theory, individuals who attain the *universalistic stage* go through the three developments of identity acceptance, identity commitment, and identity integration. Troiden's (1993) highest levels include stage three, *identity assumption*, and his fourth stage, *commitment*. Identity acceptance occurs later in stage three, and stage four involves committing oneself to a gay lifestyle. Within stage four, Troiden identifies a number of characteristics that could be argued as comprising a positive gay identity: (1) the integration of sexuality and affect; (2) positive view of gay identity; (3) increased happiness since identifying as gay; (4) having a homosexual relationship; (5) disclosure of one's gay identity to non-gays; and (5) using stigma-management strategies that originate from increased levels of openness and integrity.

Positive gay identity would begin in McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) theory at stage three, called *deepening-commitment*. Here gay persons crystallize their identities and have involvement with the gay world. Stage four, *internalization-synthesis*, is completed when individuals integrate their same-sex love within their overall identities, and when they come to view themselves as part of a minority group.

According to Cox and Gallois' (1996) social identity theory, individuals have both a personal identity and a social identity, and their non-stage model suggests that individuals aspire toward a place of viewing each identity positively. Once this is accomplished, one presumably has achieved a positive gay identity.

Other Contributions to Positive Gay Identity

Disclosing to others is often encouraged in the literature as a way of either building or demonstrating a positive gay identity (Isay, 1996; Leserman, DiSantostefano, Perkins, & Evans, 1994; Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Strommen, 1993; Murphy, 1989; Schmitt & Kurdek, 1987; Minton & McDonald, 1983-84; Cass, 1983-84, 1979; Gonsiorek, 1982a; Lee, 1977; Hencken & O'Dowd, 1977; Millham, San Miguel, & Kellogg, 1976; Hammersmith & Weinberg, 1973; Dank, 1971). The empirical literature provides mixed evidence in promoting disclosure, however, and rarely suggests it indiscriminately.

Schmitt and Kurdek (1987) studied 51 gay males and found that those who were comfortable with their gay identities and disclosed to others were low on measures of trait anxiety, sensitization, and depression and high on self concept. They also found that those in long-term relationships were psychologically healthier than those who weren't. Minton and McDonald (1983-84) reported the results from a few studies that suggested that those who remain closeted often have negative views of homosexuality and that they experience problems in self-acceptance. Garnets, Herek, and Levy (1990) concluded the same, basing this on findings from the Bell and Weinberg (1978) and Hammersmith and Weinberg (1973) studies which indicated that psychological adjustment is generally highest with those who are committed to their gay identities and with those who do not attempt to hide them.

Kaufman and Johnson (in press) interviewed ten lesbians and ten gay men and found that those who perceived a hostile reaction by their parents and friends when they disclosed experienced a more severe identity crisis than those who received a more favorable reaction. Cain (1991) interviewed 38 gay men and found that one's decision to disclose was based on particular situations and particular types of relationships. Cain suggested that a gay person doesn't need to be open to be self-accepting and one should not assume that openness is a prerequisite for having a positive gay identity. Other factors that need to be considered before disclosing are one's "race/ethnicity, class, age, geographic location, religion, occupation, [and] community support" (Fassinger & Miller, 1996).

Consequently, the literature supports the idea that disclosing is generally favorable for a person's mental well-being and that it often contributes to a positive gay identity. However, one cannot argue that it is always advantageous, given a person's individual circumstances.

Beyond disclosure, being committed to a gay identity, and developing a long-term relationship as indicators of positive gay identity, Minton and McDonald (1983-84) summarized the available evidence which suggested that the development of a positive gay identity is closely associated with having opportunities to interact with other gay people (also supported by Kus', 1988, research) and opportunities to learn more about homosexuality.

Hetrick and Martin (1984, p. 18) suggested that the development of a positive gay identity requires the "development of mutually supportive social and personal identities as a foundation for the integration of sexuality and emotionality." McDonald (1982) summarized the results of 199 usable questionnaires distributed to gay males in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and found that what distinguished individuals who had a positive gay identity from those who did not were more positive attitudes toward male homosexuality, greater participation in the gay subculture, more disclosure of their identity to others, and fewer feelings of guilt, anxiety, and shame regarding their sexuality. These findings have been replicated (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Schmitt & Kurdek, 1987; Troiden, 1984-85).

A Definition of Positive Gay Identity

After reviewing the literature on positive gay identity, and incorporating my own experience as a gay man, I offer the following as my definition of *positive gay identity*:

> *Individuals who have attained a positive gay identity have developed a high self-regard for themselves as gay persons. They view their gay status as equal to straight status. If given a choice, they would not prefer to be straight over gay, for they have come to value their uniqueness, and the richness of life that comes from being themselves. They have integrated their gay identity with their other identities, and having accomplished this, they are "out" in most areas of their lives, wherever and whenever it is not highly disadvantageous to do so. They have largely overcome their own internalized homophobia, which frees them to fully love others of the same gender.*

What is the experience like for gay men who build a positive gay identity, in spite of the political situation in Alberta which is presently unsupportive of gay individuals? Before I look at this, let me describe the methodology and the philosophy which underlie the approach I took in my research.

CHAPTER THREE:

Methodology and Research Design

> *It would be a very healthy emphasis in the behavioral sciences if we could recognize that it is the dedicated, personal search of a disciplined, open-minded individual which discovers and creates new knowledge. No refinement of laboratory or statistical method can do this . . .*
>
> *(Rogers, 1965, cited in Moustakas, 1990, p. 98).*

Methodology

Introduction

As a young child, I watched people's reactions while they rode a roller coaster. The unnerving screams I heard seemed inconsistent with the look of exhilaration and pleasure on their faces once the ride ended. Is this insanity, or merely the relief one experiences after surviving such a torturous ordeal?

Now as an adult, I know there are different ways to study reactions to a roller coaster. For example, I might use any number of measures to get an idea of the behaviors associated with the ride. Physiological readings might include measuring changes in pulse, body temperature, or vocal properties, like loudness and pitch. Psychological measurements might include comparing the traits of individuals who ride roller coasters with those who don't, or comparing the reactions of the same group of participants on various carnival rides. Subjective reactions could be measured by responses to likert scales.

Another approach would involve interviewing riders soon after they get off the roller coaster. Hearing more about their experience, I could begin to really understand what it must be like to take that ride. There is still a distance between me and that phenomena, of course, because I am still trying to understand from the perspective of the other.

If I *really* want to know what it's like to ride a roller coaster, I have to get on it. Now, the unnerving screams I hear are my own. So is the look of exhilaration and pleasure on my face once the ride ends. I may still interview others who have also ridden roller coasters, but nothing can replace the tacit knowledge I've gained through this experience. The choice is whether to ignore it or acknowledge it in my inquiry. I decided the latter.

Choosing a Philosophy

I took a philosophy course in 1974 and we questioned God's existence. In 1998 I noticed an advertisement for an upcoming debate on God's existence. You'd think by now we would know the answer. After all, the question is as old as humanity itself.

Unless one believes in a particular philosophy, there is no knowledge that can be gained through methodologies that depend on it. All research is guided by a theoretical orientation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), and theory is rooted in philosophy (Roth, 1993). Using my earlier example of God's existence, a devout atheist disavows any "knowledge" offered by spiritualists, and vice versa.

"The worth of a study is the degree to which it generates theory, description, or understanding" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 46). Patton (1990) and Rogers (1985) argued that a researcher is wise to choose a method of scientific inquiry that can best answer the research question. That is, the research question suggests the methodology. For myself, however, as I suspect is true for many others, I first chose a philosophy. Later came the exact wording of my question, which in turn suggested an appropriate research strategy.

Philosophically, I needed to research from a deep conviction in human equality. My own coming out had earlier brought me to a place of humility, and I could not leave that place now. I didn't want to be at "arms' length" from that which I studied either. Specifically, I wanted to do a qualitative study about gay men.

Choosing a Methodology

I had to ask myself, *"how visible do I want to be in this dissertation?"* Even within qualitative inquiry, there are many methodologies.

As a younger person, I spent a lot of time being distant. I was, and am, an introvert, and I can easily get lost in the world of ideas and reflection. I didn't want to do that this time. This is my Ph.D., the *finale*. I am a student of Counselling Psychology. If self growth is not a big part of what I am doing, perhaps therapy is what I should seek instead of what I should offer. I decided that I wanted to be in the middle of my research. After all, once you've gone down the roller coaster, you cannot pretend it didn't happen. Swami Radhananda (1995, p. 7) expressed it well: "No amount of reading or talking can be a substitute for the gift of your own experience."

The fire was already burning brightly, and I was in it. My passion for this topic made *heuristics* the best choice of methodology.

Heuristics and The Knowing Self

Heuristic research originated with its founder, Clark Moustakas, who launched its debut with publication of his book *Loneliness* in 1961. "The root meaning of *heuristic* comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 17). A heuristic investigation begins within the researcher, and ends within the researcher. The researcher is present throughout the study, and the process is expected to produce greater self-awareness and self-knowledge.

The purpose of heuristic inquiry is "to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39). A qualifier for conducting heuristic research is that the researcher must have personally experienced the phenomena in question (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). A distinguishing feature of heuristic inquiry as compared to other qualitative methodologies is its emphasis on the passion of the researcher in making discoveries. As contrasted to phenomenology and grounded theory, heuristics maintain the essence of the person within the experience (Patton, 1990).

Philosophically, the view in heuristics is that knowledge begins from within. To have experienced something is to know it, at least implicitly. For example, how can you really know the pain of losing your rights unless you have experienced it, like an incarcerated criminal or an involuntarily committed mental patient? How can you know the chaos and eventual peace that derives from coming to terms with being gay, unless you have gone through it? The self possesses knowledge about that which has been experienced. The internal heuristic search begins the unlocking of these inner truths.

Other methodologies require that the researcher stand back from the data to create greater objectivity in the analysis. In standing back, however, the ethnographer and phenomenologist may miss something of the culture or person they are studying, for example. People can easily hide truth from those who do not understand the subtleties of denial. If nothing else, the intensity or intimacy may be lacking, and there is something about an experience's intensity that is at the core of the very experience itself. Without intensity, experience is soon forgotten.

In contrast to hermaneutics, another qualitative methodology, heuristics does not involve an interpretation of experience, nor does it look for how "history, art, politics, or other human enterprises account for and explain the meanings of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19). The stories of the people depicted in a heuristic study are *their* stories. It is *their* perspective that needs to be understood by the reader.

According to Moustakas (1990), there are six phases required of heuristic research, and a number of concepts and processes that underlie these phases. I will begin with their description.

Heuristic Concepts and Processes

Identifying with the Focus of Inquiry is the heuristic expression for being able to really get into the phenomenon under question, and to "become one with it" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). Without having passion for the topic, for example, it is unlikely that one could deeply identify with what is being studied.

Self-dialogue refers to either literally entering a dialogue with the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1990), or at least to examining the phenomenon by reflecting on it (K. A. Moustakas, 1993). One needs to be able to face the experience with openness (Roth, 1993) and permit a process of "self-interaction and self-inquiry" (Christmas, 1991, p. 50).

Tacit knowing lays "the foundation for all other heuristic concepts" (K. A. Moustakas, 1993, p. 54). Polanyi (1983) coined this term to describe the notion that we often know something implicitly, but we cannot always describe or name it. Polanyi used the example of our ability to recognize someone we know in a crowd of millions. Our ability to recognize consists of those elements that we can describe or name, called *subsidiary factors*, and those that are implicit, called *focal factors*. When that which is tacit becomes explicit, describing the wholeness or essence of a phenomenon becomes possible.

Intuition is the heuristic process which allows information from the tacit dimension to become explicit, and hence visible and describable. It is the process that allows the phenomenon to be seen holistically (Christmas, 1991). Tacit knowing and intuition guide the work of the heuristic researcher (Roth, 1993).

Indwelling is another heuristic term borrowed from Polanyi (Moustakas, 1990). "Indwelling refers to the heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature of meaning of a quality or theme of human experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24). This process is conscious and deliberate. It entails allowing a relevant cognition of any variety (e.g., thought, image, dream) to sink deeply into one's psyche for careful review and reflection. The goal is to unravel "every possible texture, layer, and meaning of the experience" (K. A. Moustakas, 1993, p. 54-55). To indwell is to stay with whatever is being considered for a time.

Focusing is a related concept, and it involves paying "undivided attention to a particular thought, feeling or aspect of an experience" (K. A. Moustakas, 1993, p. 55). Indwelling requires focusing, while focusing does not necessarily entail indwelling. Consequently, focusing can be viewed as a subprocess underlying indwelling: it is a necessary, but insufficient, aspect of it.

The internal frame of reference is the final concept described as necessary to heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990). Comparable to other qualitative methodologies, the way that a heuristic researcher is expected to extract the nature and essence of a human experience is through "the internal frame of reference of the person who has had, is having, or will have the experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 26). One tries to "put oneself in the other person's shoes" (Patton, 1990, p. 47). Besides understanding my reality, I am trying to understand the reality of co-researchers from their perspective.

The heuristic concepts and processes described weave through the six phases of heuristic research. Although the phases read and are described in Moustakas (1990) as discrete stages, they do not always follow a linear progression, and back and forth movement is expected.

Six Phases of Heuristic Research

Initial engagement is the first phase of heuristics. It occurs when the researcher "first becomes aware that there is a particular issue or concern that he or she would like to understand more deeply and fully" (McCormack, 1994, p. 72). This phase ends once a research question of intense personal interest is found.

The second phase is *immersion* into the topic and question. One becomes so totally engrossed in the topic that one lives it "in waking, sleeping, and even dream states" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). The researcher seeks thorough knowledge of the topic during this phase (Grodi, 1995). Christmas (1991) describes immersion as where the "researcher 'lives' the question" (p. 48). It is accomplished through self-dialogue, spontaneous conversations with others, in readings, and by entering other situations that may deepen understanding of the phenomenon (Christmas, 1991).

The third phase is *incubation*, where the researcher retreats from the intense focus on the question. This allows time for one's inner workings to digest the experience. During incubation, the tacit dimension and intuition work together to "clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29). Incubation allows a seed of understanding to germinate and grow. Whereas immersion was an active process, incubation occurs in a passive state (McCormack, 1994).

The fourth phase of *illumination* occurs naturally as the researcher becomes open to tacit knowledge and intuition. The illumination occurs as qualities of the phenomena and themes emerge from one's inner self. It is here that serendipity rules, and when the time is right, one is struck by the "aha" phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). "During this phase, the researcher becomes consciously aware of qualities and characteristics related to the question and the way they fit together to form themes" (Christmas, 1991, p. 49).

The fifth phase is *explication*, which involves examining in depth the qualities and themes which have emerged from the previous phase. The explication is enhanced through conversations and dialogues with others. "In the explication process, the heuristic researcher utilizes focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure, and recognizes that meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal frames of reference" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31). The challenge in the explication phase is to create a comprehensive depiction (called a *composite depiction*) of the phenomenon, a story which contains all the relevant themes, meanings, and essences (Christmas, 1991).

The sixth phase of heuristic research is the *creative synthesis*, whereby the researcher creates an original integration of all the material collected, including one's own "intuition, imagination, and personal knowledge of meanings and essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 50). The creative synthesis can take many artistic forms (eg., song, poem, metaphorical tale), but most commonly is presented as a narrative description. "The synthesis is a distillation of essences of the experience, as seen through my own eyes, as the primary researcher" (Christmas, 1991, p. 131). Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p. 52) suggested that the synthesis is not a "summary or recapitulation." It is the hallmark of the heuristic journey: the end is more than the sum of its parts. Let me explain.

The composite depiction, which is written as part of the explication phase, contains all of the themes and meanings discovered as reflected in the experience of the primary researcher and the co-researchers. Its intent is to be comprehensive and generic. Other qualitative methodologies lead to a similar place of integrating extracted themes and meanings. The heuristic inquiry goes one further step by taking the researcher back into self. What began from within will now end from within. The creative synthesis brings back the "I," the subjective "me" that has gone through the journey of exploring this phenomenon from start to finish. The synthesis reflects the impact. The tacit dimension and intuition have now flowered, and the petals are carefully arranged by the gardener's touch.

The Research Design

The Initial Steps

I began my Ph.D. program in September 1995, and although I knew initially that my research would have something to do with gay men, I had not formulated my research question. This takes time and a fuller appreciation of possible methodologies. After writing a few papers on related gay topics and extensive reading, I chose my research question sometime between February and March 1996, and my proposal was accepted by my Candidacy Examining Committee on May 28, 1996. In essence, this is the "green light" -- the acceptance of my research proposal, and the beginning of my dissertation.

Although I wanted to begin the immersion phase, I had obligations and course work that needed completion. By August, however, I was ready. I packed my bicycle, my tent, and all necessary supplies in my stationwagon and drove to Kananaskis Provincial Park, located in the Rocky Mountains one hour east of Calgary, Alberta. My directories told me of a back country campground situated at the edge of Barrier Lake. From where I parked my car, I had a 30 minute bike ride with gear to get to it. A rather arduous task, but it was what I needed to become focused. University and life itself had taken its toll.

> *I am now in the mountains at Barrier Lake in the Kananaskis. It is magnificent here. I am a few yards away from my campsite, right at a creek that feeds the lake. I hear the constant sound of water trickling across the rocks. I am here to*

> *answer the question, "What is the experience of men who construct and integrate a positive gay identity?"*
>
> *(Journal entry, August 6, 1996)*

That was the beginning of my first day at Barrier Lake. I stayed for three nights. I alternated writing with hiking. I was reminded that I was not alone, hearing tales of a mountain lion sighting nearby and my own observation of a black bear cub that was as curious about me as I was about him. The only difference being that *my* mom wasn't nearby!

This experience began the immersion phase of my research. Pages later, I left Barrier Lake and allowed myself some time for my thoughts to incubate before beginning the interviews with some gay men I already knew, and some whom I would discover while absorbed in my quest.

Ethics, Informed Consent, and Questionnaires

Before beginning data collection (interviews in my case) involving people, researchers require approval from the Research and Ethics Committee of a University. This helps to ensure that researchers conduct their studies in a way that upholds the highest ethical principles in their work. The Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Educational Psychology approved my study on August 9, 1996.

One of my practicums in the 1995/1996 school year was at the University of Alberta Hospital, where I worked with people who were HIV positive. As I was also interested in the impact that being HIV positive may have on one's positive gay identity, I wanted permission to interview one or two outpatients of the hospital. This necessitated securing ethical clearance from the hospital itself. This request was approved in October 1996.

The Informed Consent Form which was approved by the two ethics committees was used in the study. A copy of it appears in appendix A.

Along with the Informed Consent Form, a cover letter, a list of sample interview questions, and three questionnaires were mailed to each co-researcher before the interview date. A copy of each also appears in appendix A.

The three questionnaires, designed by myself, were entitled as follows: (1) Identity Questionnaire; (2) Sexual Orientation Questionnaire; and (3) Biographical Questionnaire. The Identity Questionnaire included four questions regarding potential co-researchers' self-definition as either straight, bisexual, or gay, their degree of certainty regarding this self-definition (5-point likert scale), their own definition of positive gay identity, and the extent to which they felt they had attained it (5-point likert scale).

The Sexual Orientation Questionnaire is based on the theoretical work advanced by Shively and DeCecco (1977). In their article, they argued that the measurement of sexual orientation by Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) was too limited. Kinsey's group measured sexual orientation by asking individuals to rate their sexual behavior and their sexual fantasies on a single continuous scale. Shively and DeCecco (1977) suggested that ratings should be made on a separate scale for heterosexual interest and homosexual interest. Furthermore, they added that ratings of sexual orientation should include behavior, affect, and fantasy. Gonsiorek, Sell, and Weinrich (1995) added that in measuring sexual orientation, one should also inquire about changes that may occur in sexual object choice over time.

The Sexual Orientation Questionnaire that I designed allowed for these suggestions (see appendix A). Its purpose was to provide each co-researcher a convenient means of self-reporting his degree of homosexual and heterosexual inclination.

I designed the Biographical Questionnaire to give me background information on each co-researcher. I anticipated that this information would help me in writing their stories accurately. Furthermore, I expected that having this information at the beginning of an interview would provide cues to some areas that could be explored toward the end of the interview.

The sample questions provided in the mailout included the initial lead-in question I asked of each co-researcher, and two sample questions from each period of past, present, and future. In so doing, I hoped that the co-researchers would have some time to reflect on their entire experience of building a positive gay identity before our interview.

The Search for Co-Researchers

The methodology in a qualitative study is described as *emergent*, which means that much of it develops once you get started in your research (Patton, 1990). For example, you don't know from the outset how many people you will interview. Moustakas (1990) mentioned that a heuristic investigator may interview as many as 10 to 15 co-researchers, but there is not a predetermined number. Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist, was credited with having said that a good time to stop was when you are too bored to continue, after having "heard it all" (Morse, 1995, p. 147). The general rule of thumb is to keep interviewing until new themes or meanings are no longer emerging, commonly called "redundancy" or "saturation" in the literature (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I had been considering potential co-researchers for two years. Through my social life and friendship circle, I had met many gay men in both Edmonton and Calgary. I hoped that some people I knew could lead me to still others who could speak to my research question, but who was I looking for? What would an individual with a positive gay identity look like? There is no "test" that can determine this, and in fact the construct is ill-defined to begin with (see chapter two for explanation).

My intuition[10] led me to individuals who felt good about themselves as gay men. This didn't mean that they had to have it "all worked out." No one knows what that would even look like. Perhaps my research will help unfold the mystery that underlies the tacit dimension of positive gay identity, but that knowledge is not there from the beginning. In heuristics, one looks for individuals who have had an intense, but not extreme, experience with the phenomenon (Patton, 1990), and that became a requirement as well. As I explain in chapter four how each co-researcher came into my study, here I will simply say that I felt compelled to keep going until I had interviewed 16 co-researchers.

The Procedure Followed With Each Co-Researcher

I generally followed the same procedure with each co-researcher. After finding someone who I thought would be potentially suitable[11], I telephoned him so that we could talk freely about my study. I attempted to standardize this somewhat to ensure thoroughness, ethical protocol, and to ascertain whether he was an appropriate co-researcher. The "telephone patter" is reprinted in appendix B.

An interview time and place was then established, and the forms were mailed to his house. Each co-researcher was asked to complete these forms and have them available at the commencement of the interview. Fourteen of the interviews were held at the co-researcher's dwelling, and two were held at my apartment.

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[10] In heuristic research, the intent is not to generate a "random sample." Rather, individuals are chosen who are articulate and who have experienced the phenomena under study with intensity.

[11] Potentially suitable co-researchers were individuals who displayed a positive attitude about their gay identity, or who were referred by others who believed them to be positive gay men.

Before beginning the interview proper, I spent sufficient time establishing rapport with the co-researcher and ensured that he understood the Informed Consent Form and had signed it. Any preliminary questions were answered. While the co-researcher then reviewed the sample questions, I read over the forms and noted queries that I had from this supplied information.

The interviews occurred between October and December, 1996, and were taped using a high quality Sony TCM-AP1V cassette recorder with two Sony ECM-T10 lapel microphones. I began each interview by asking an initial question, *"I want to understand the journey you embarked upon to feel good about yourself as a gay man. In other words, tell me the story of how you came to adopt a positive gay identity."* From that lead in, the interview proceeded as an informal conversational interview (Moustakas, 1990) until the phenomenon had been thoroughly discussed. At that point, I brought out my list of questions[12] (see appendix C) and asked those that had not already been answered through the interview. The taped interviews were each between one-and-a-half hours and three hours in length.

Transcribing the Interviews and Writing the Narratives

Each taped interview was transcribed verbatim by one of two experienced transcribers, paid on an hourly basis, that I hired for this purpose. I questioned myself as to how I would write the narratives, recognizing that to stay true to a heuristic methodology, I would need to ensure the internal frame of reference of each co-researcher. Their stories were also expected to depict the individual meanings of their experience, while maintaining their essence as individuals.

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[12] **NOTE:** Three questions were asked at the end of each interview as follows:
(1) *What advice would you give to teenagers or men when they first come out to themselves?*
(2) *Is there a metaphor, image, movie, or piece of music that really speaks to your gay identity?*
(3) *Do you practice any rituals as a way of celebrating your gay identity?*
The co-researchers' responses to these questions are found in appendices D, E, and F, respectively.

I decided to work from the transcripts themselves, while adding detail from the completed questionnaires as needed. Like whittling wood, I took off slivers until I had a finished product. I chipped away at each transcript, firstly removing my comments and questions, and secondly getting rid of the pauses, the breaks in sentences, and other extraneous utterances. Next, I moved passages around to make each story read chronologically for the most part. Wherever I could, I kept the co-researcher's own language and nuances of expression. Consequently, the end product retained most of the co-researchers original intent and use of language.

Analysis of the Data

Coding the Transcripts and Extracting Themes

In their discussion of coding, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) present the example of imagining a large gymnasium filled with thousands of toys. If you were asked to sort these toys according to your own classification scheme, you might end up sorting them according to any number of criteria (e.g., size, color, manufacturer, type of material made from, age appropriateness). The qualitative researcher performs a similar function, albeit more difficult. *Coding* is defined as the techniques used for conceptualizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I began by working with my own "transcript," which was really the writing I did while in the Kananaskis. Using all of my journal entries, I first wrote my narrative, and then I began extracting themes from all of the material that described my experience of building a positive gay identity.

Each transcript of my co-researchers was printed on letter-sized paper using a landscape orientation (i.e., lengthwise). Each line of the transcript was numbered. The left margin was set at 4.7 inches and the entire text was double-spaced, leaving ample room for coding. As suggested by one of my dissertation supervisors, Dr. Jevne, three columns were drawn in the left margin of every page on each transcript. The three columns were labelled from left-to-right, *themes, issues,* and *content*. The notes I made in the content column were in some cases verbatim extracts from the actual text, and were paraphrased in other instances. The issues column was for writing in broader-based conceptualizations of what the content represented. In some cases, a still broader conceptualization was possible, called a theme. These were written in the column furthest to the left. The first three transcripts were coded line-by-line, followed by coding which included a number of sentences, where possible, in subsequent transcripts. The intent was not to miss any theme or meaning. Bogdan and Bilken (1992) recommend creating a system with a limited number of codes between thirty and fifty. I was generally around the fifty mark at most points through the analysis.

After coding the first four transcripts, I listed all of the themes and issues I had derived so far, and typed either paraphrased or verbatim pieces of the transcripts under each theme or issue that exemplified it. I included my own themes and issues in this exercise as well. I then laid out each individual theme and issue, with its examples typed underneath, in my living room to see if there was a way to begin categorizing these into bigger structures, which I will call *categories*. The broadest categories I used then were themes and issues that arose *before coming out* (i.e., self-defining as gay), and those that occurred *after coming out*. A few subcategories were established then as well. Next, I created a template which included these categories, subcategories, and the remaining themes and issues.

I photocopied enough templates so that I had one to use with each remaining transcript. I continued coding by making notes within the three columns as I did earlier for the first four transcripts. Additionally, I began writing paraphrased or verbatim examples from the transcript directly into its appropriate place on the template of themes and issues. As I worked through the transcripts, I also added additional themes and issues onto the template as necessary.

Once all the transcripts were coded and their accompanying templates completed, I typed all of the examples from the templates into their respective subcategory, theme, or issue. Again I laid these out in my living room and attempted to find larger structures in which to subsume some of this data. This time, I got rid of the two major categories, and developed eight. They did not seem to hang together very well, but they were inclusive and maintained the integrity of all the coded data. That was on September 22, 1997.

I met with my two supervisors in October 1997, and Dr. Jevne queried me on the eight categories. After our visit, I knew I hadn't found it yet . . . something was missing. There seemed to be a logical flow of experience and process up to where I lumped a wad of themes into a category I called "sexual orientation indicators." They seemed to stand alone, yet they were of great importance to myself and everyone I interviewed. The categories didn't weave well together. An integration was missing.

I began using the heuristic processes of self-dialogue, focusing, indwelling, and intuition, and my main internal search became that around the image of integration. The *illumination*, as it is called in heuristic inquiry, struck me on October 31, 1997. On Halloween day, the cobwebs cleared, and I was now able to reorganize the data into three major categories: *before coming out, coming out (to self)*, and *toward establishing a positive gay identity*. Integration flowed, and the subcategories and themes came together. My composite depiction in chapter five is based on this classification. The classification itself can be found in appendix G.

Feedback from Co-Researchers and the "Themes Questionnaire"

By the time I had finished preparing my classification scheme on September 22, 1997, I had also finished writing my second draft of the stories for my 16 co-researchers. It was time to get their feedback. From the classification scheme, I prepared a "Themes Questionnaire" which included all of the themes that I had used in coding. Constructed as a checklist, it had two columns on the right side for the co-researcher to check if the item applied to him either in the past and/or in the present regarding his building of a positive gay identity.

A cover letter, the co-researcher's story, and the Themes Questionnaire were mailed to the co-researchers on September 30, 1997. Each co-researcher was asked to edit their story for content and for adequate confidentiality, and to return this in the self-addressed stamped envelope along with the completed Themes Questionnaire. These were all returned by January 1998. The checklist appears in appendix H, along with the number and percentage of those who placed checkmarks in each column. In this way, I was able to ascertain if a theme was experienced by each co-researcher, even if it was not discussed in the interview itself with that particular co-researcher.

The Power of Stories

Hermans (1996) wrote that late in the 19th century, William James implicitly suggested that the story is a powerful way to understand the self. They are also a powerful way to see the perception of another person who has lived a different life from our own. As the following quote aptly describes, they can be deeply moving:

> But stories! Stories are the vehicle that moves metaphor and image into experience. Like metaphors and images, stories communicate what is generally

> invisible and ultimately inexpressible. In seeking to understand these realities through time, stories provide a perspective that touches on the divine, allowing us to see reality in full context, as part of its larger whole. Stories invite a kind of vision that gives shape and form even to the invisible, making the images move, clothing the metaphors, throwing color into the shadows. Of all the devices available to us, stories are the surest way of touching the human spirit (Kurtz & Ketcham, 1996, p. 17).

Roth (1993), in her dissertation, eloquently wrote that in heuristics, "I become a story teller lighting the labyrinth, the winding way, to understanding that is deepened in relationships . . ." (p. 61).

The stories that follow are vivid, accurate portraits of people's lives. I have changed little of the wording, and some of the wording is graphic and perhaps offensive to some. My priority here is to remain in the internal frame of reference of those whose story I have the privilege of telling. Becoming gay has not been without its turbulence, its pain, and its consequences. The next page begins *our* story, as told through the words of a few courageous souls.

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Stories

If we wait until we are not afraid to speak, we will be speaking from our graves.
(Lorde, 1984, cited in O'Conor, 1995, p. 15)

PRIMARY RESEARCHER: *"KEVIN"*

Present Occupation: Student and Psychologist

Present Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
40	36	10

My Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

Individuals who have attained a positive gay identity have developed a high self-regard for themselves as gay persons. They view their gay status as equal to straight status. If given a choice, they would not prefer to be straight over gay, for they have come to value their uniqueness, and the richness of life that comes from being themselves. They have integrated their gay identity with their other identities, and having accomplished this, they are "out" in most areas of their lives, wherever and whenever it is not highly disadvantageous to do so. They have largely overcome their own internalized homophobia, which frees them to fully love others of the same gender.

My Story:

I'm playing with my friends, enjoying their company outside on a warm summer day. We always get together. We play tag, we chase each other, we wrestle, we laugh. I like them, and they like me. Nothing about it seems remarkable. Mom doesn't like it, though. I can see the expression on her face through the window: a scowl that makes Halloween ghouls seem friendly by comparison. She told me before that I should play with other boys, and not with girls. I don't understand why. I'm seven-years old, and I should be able to choose my own friends. Deep down, I know that it is a sissy-thing to do, however. . . to play with girls. But they are my friends. I just want to be like the other kids. I don't want to be different.

I caused an uproar between my parents when I asked them for a doll. My sisters had dolls, and I wanted one too. They have fun playing with them, but they often exclude me from their play. My parents worry that if I am given a doll, maybe this will hurt me in some way. I get my wish, however. I don't think either of them like it, but I really like my doll. I just want to be like the other kids. I don't want to be different.

I've had a deep fear of water from a very young age. My dad called me a sissy because I would not wade further than ankle deep. I hate that word, "sissy," especially when dad uses it. I know he is disappointed in me.

I'm ten years old and I'm beginning to develop erotic feelings toward a male. I adore my future brother-in-law's body. He is 19 and nicely developed (everywhere). That same summer, I am at the beach cautiously staring at an incredibly handsome teenager. His tanned shirtless torso shines under the dimming light of dusk. The evening's coolness accentuates his perfect pectorals and erect nipples. I am nearly breathless with arousal. I want to replace his girlfriend. I want to be the one hugged.

I also want to sink into the earth and never reemerge. What is wrong with me? I don't want to be like this. There is a word for people like this, and I am not going to be one of them. I don't want to be different.

Around age twelve, I see two younger teens doubling on a bike. They are both blonde, blue-eyed stallions. Both are very handsome, wearing blue jeans and open jean jackets, shirtless underneath. I find myself fixated again, staring at their indescribable beauty. They notice my stare, and rudely yell "take a picture, it will last longer," while also screaming out "FAGGOT!!" This is the first time I've been called that name. I know what it means, and it is the worst thing you can call a guy. My feelings are hurt, and I don't ever want to hear that vile word again. I still just want to be like the other kids. I don't want to be different. . . but I am well on my way.

I have my first crush on an agemate at age thirteen. He has been in my grade seven class. I think he is incredibly cool, and gorgeous. He reminds me of Donny Osmond, whom I also think is beyond mortal description. At the end of grade seven, he expresses interest in hanging out with me. All of his cool friends are away for the summer. I can't believe it. I am so "uncool" it hurts. I wear welfare glasses, I own an interesting array of "flood" pants, and I look and act like a total nerd.

I've tried very hard to suppress my deepest feelings so that I would fit in, yet paradoxically, I never fit in despite my efforts. This fosters deep feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem within me. The low self-esteem remains until I come out much, much later.

That summer, 1971, is my best teenage summer. I adore my friend, and he can do no wrong in my eyes. We hang out together daily. When school begins, however, he treats me like I no longer exist. I feel crushed, but I knew this summer thing would end. I was merely a fill-in. We were never physical, but my feelings for him are very strong. I hurt deeply, but I cannot let anyone know about my pain. They will think I am a fag.

I begin dating women at age eighteen. Losing my virginity is an interesting experience . . . one that I try to analyze subsequently for a long time. There is no question regarding the pleasure of orgasm. It increased my desire to have a girlfriend, especially a companion, but I find it difficult to establish. Most women I date only want to be friends. I am convinced I am ugly and unlovable.

At age twenty, I meet a seventeen-year-old I will call "Dana." We start dating, and soon become intimate. She is very attractive, and I visit her three times a week primarily for sex. We also do things out of the bedroom, but my head points mostly in one direction. After eight months of this, my head hurts. The realization has been building that I virtually have no feelings for Dana. It comes as no surprise when I break up with her. I never grieve over her, but I often grieve over how I unwittingly used her.

I wonder if I will ever fall in love. I romanticize the thought of being in love, but I seriously doubt that it will ever happen to me. Why am I not worthy? I do not understand my own self-talk. Little did I know what was soon to transpire.

At twenty-two years of age, I begin my second job since graduating with my Bachelor of Arts degree. I like adolescents, and here I am working at a detention facility for delinquent youth. These young people really like me. I respect them, and I enjoy joking with them. Sometimes I think I am right where they are. Deep down, I've always felt like a deviant. I don't know why. I think it helps me relate to the underdog, though, and so perhaps it is a blessing.

I like to spend a lot of time talking to "Roger." It's like I tuck him in at night -- I sit on the edge of his bed, and we talk. He is nearly sixteen, and he is dreadfully handsome and well-built for his age. His muscles allure me. We relate well to each other. Soon he returns home, and I suspect that I will never see him again. I feel good because I think I got through to him.

We write letters to each other, and I enjoy having a pen pal. A few months later, he is in crisis with his parents, and he calls to ask if he can stay with me at my mom's. Mom agrees to having him stay with us for two weeks. As two weeks metamorphizes into six, and as his precarious lifestyle clashes with mom's, she can take no more. Roger has to go, and surprisingly, so do I. I'm moving away for the first time with a sixteen-year-old, and my mom's intuition seems sharp that day. She asks with quivering voice, strangely ready to break, *"Are you a homosexual?"*

"Are you a homosexual?" Imagine my own mother asking me this. I've been insulted before, but my mom ought to know better. I reassure her that it is merely time I move out. Mom is pretty smart, though, but even she wasn't ready for the devastation that would follow.

He sees me as his best friend, and of course I am. I will do anything for him. His lifestyle is a lot different from mine. He brings young women over almost every night, and I don't understand why I am going through emotional hell hearing the bedroom sounds through paper-thin walls that torture me.

A few months later, I can no longer function. I don't know what is wrong with me. I feel confused, unmotivated, irrational, and anxious. My panic attack lands me in the hospital. The psychiatrist tells me that my stepfather told him that he thinks I might be a homosexual. I feel such disgust that anyone, especially family, thinks this of me. A few days later I leave the hospital, and I move into a Christian centre for people suffering emotional distress. Thankfully, I had already seen "Hans," the Christian counsellor on site a number of times as an "outpatient."

I enjoy our sessions. We talk about my natural father's death, and I grieve this. Each session, I grieve it some more. In spite of my grieving, I get worse. Now I can only get out of bed to wash and to eat. My sleep is fitful, and sometimes I awaken in a delirious state. I bang the wall. I'm sure I have lost my mind, and I don't know why.

Hans and I never talk about what is causing my pain. Somehow, I can never utter that I feel completely heartbroken, and he can never ask. I don't have a vocabulary for this knawing hurt. So I keep on hurting for months in a code of silence that perhaps only the military would commend.

Eventually a new day is born. The sun shines brightly today, and I can see again the color of life. The greying of my heart has lifted, and today I know that Hans was incorrect in believing my pain was about my father's death. I now understand what daily marijuana use can do to a young man's mind. It can twist your feelings all around and make you believe things that are not true. I will never smoke it again.

Dating women occurs sporadically, and unsuccessfully. I am not bonding to any of them. Neither are they to me. Years of loneliness blur my hope. Perhaps another degree will help. Within two months of beginning university, I meet June. She is such an intellectual, and I am impressed. The first night I meet her, we go to her place to have tea. She sits like royalty upon her chair, and speaks with an air I have not experienced before.

We date, and I develop a respect for her like I have never felt toward a woman. Our talks delve into every possible dream and reality that words can describe. Is this love? I reticently think so. We move in together, and before the federal government takes away a matrimonial tax advantage, I propose to her. She accepts. Our friendship grows ever stronger. We love spending time together. We walk, we talk, we dine, we play.

. . . And then there's sex. There is no question regarding the pleasure of orgasm. I try to analyze it. But I am so far away. I fantasize about men mostly, and sometimes about women. I cannot understand why June does not enjoy having sex with me. I care for her deeply. Our caring eventually blesses us with two children. They are too beautiful for words.

I am going crazy, though, and I don't know why. It's 1992, and years of blind unhappiness are hurting me. It doesn't seem that remarkable when the officer charges me with shoplifting today. What should I expect? Sooner or later, you have to expect to get caught.

My lawyer seems surprised, however. He wonders why a successful psychologist has committed this offence. I don't have a good answer for him. I always felt like a deviant, and perhaps this is how it expresses itself? Perhaps I did it for excitement? He suggests that I either register for a special program for shoplifters, or that I seek out professional therapy. I discount his advice at first. At least until I can't take it anymore.

During the same semester, I develop incredibly strong attachment toward two young men at college. One I teach, the other I counsel. Why do I miss "Jason" so much when he misses a class? Why do I long for having the next session with "Travis"? I even start playing basketball with Travis occasionally at lunch time. My professional boundaries are getting stretched. So is my psyche.

I worry about going to court, I yell too often at my kids, I drink excessively, I have my own separate bedroom at home, my feelings for these two guys are beyond me, and my back is killing me from a disk that I ruptured earlier. This attack of pain is excruciatingly severe, and it's not just my lower back anymore. I reach out for help.

My psychiatrist is wonderful. He is brilliant. He has style. He asks poignant questions that deeply frighten me, however. At the end of our first session, I feel like vomiting. I can't imagine I just shared such deep thoughts, feelings, and fantasies. He sends me away with some questionnaires to complete, and asks that I return them before our next session.

Near the end of our second session, he tells me that he knows what my underlying problem is. Funny how I feel so arrogant hearing him say that. How could he know my problem so quickly, when I have been unable to figure it out my entire life? I say to him, "*Well, what is it?*" Now I'm aware of a deeper fear I wasn't expecting, as though I anticipate hearing that I have cancer or something equally terrifying. He looks at me, and replies, ***"you are a homosexual, a gay man who had never come to terms with yourself."***

I am seeing him about my shoplifting and my unhappy life, and now my head is exploding. I feel overwhelmed with an array of feelings and emotions firing through my nervous system simultaneously. From fear, anxiety, distrust, anger, betrayal, guilt, shame, disappointment, confusion, shock, disbelief, and outrage on the one hand, to joy, exhilaration, certainty, trust, euphoria, mania, and knowing on the other. The ying and the yang in mortal combat, truth and lies in monumental karmic collision. Is this my brain on drugs? No, this is my brain facing reality.

I think drugs would have been easier. During the months of healing that followed, I was more emotional than I have ever been. My thoughts and feelings were on a roller coaster. I quit my private practice. I stop sessional teaching. I leave what I can to embrace what I need to face.

My sessions with the psychiatrist never get any easier either. He challenges my thinking, often in Socratic dialogue. His arguments are persuasive, and denial is giving way to something I learned to ignore and devalue . . . my deepest, most passionate feelings.

I have now been seeing my therapist for six months. I decide it is time to tell June. I am ready one night in July 1993. June and I retire to the living room to sit and talk. I tell her. Initially she displays little adverse reaction. Denial is not only my domain. We continue enjoying each other's company through the months of summer. Little did I know the deep depression she masked for me. Little did she know either.

The two of us meet my psychiatrist together for one session. He tells us that we don't have a marriage. We know this already, but hearing it from him solidifies it. Our marriage will end.

I write a journal entry on November 8, 1993:

> *It seems that the reality of leaving June has hit me hard. She has gone out (9:30 p.m.), and I am going to bed (10:00 p.m.). Soon I will need to once again get used to this aloneness. I don't think I can walk out on June . . . I love her too much. Why would I leave her and the kids for the emptiness I feel? Gay guys seem so noncommittal -- like fuck buddies*[13]*. But I am getting older - 37 to be exact -- and I feel the clock churning [stomach churning].*
>
> *When June gets home, she lies with me. Tears flowing down my face, I can't talk to her yet. I need more time I am so choked. I want to tell her how I feel, how scared I am, and I want her to understand. I don't want to hurt her . . . she is the closest I have to a soulmate. Can my soul be so wrong? Do I need to leave her and take up own residence? I'm not sure I can cope with this . . . I'm really not sure. The fear of total incapacitating depression (I've been there before) lurks in my psyche. I don't know how I could cope with another bout. Am I bringing it on myself? Can I stop it without denying myself again?*

Many questions plague my mind. The transition from posturing as a straight man with a wife and two children to being a gay man becomes the most difficult change I have ever faced. More than anything, I value having an intact family, and being there for them. I am throwing a boulder on the very value that I hold so dear to my heart.

Where is my hope? I hate myself at times, and despise myself. My only hope is that I will someday find love. Maybe I will come to know what it is like to feel passion for someone, someone who can reciprocate.

I begin dating men, and enter a new phase of my life. "Robert" is the first man I court. We arrive back at his place in the late afternoon on a warm autumn day. Before exiting the car, I lean over to kiss him on the lips. He backs off. He is uncomfortable. I forgot. In the past, I never hesitated to kiss my date in public before. I've entered a different world.

Once inside his dwelling, I continue my advance, and experience the roughness of a five o'clock shadow for the first time. It hurts my sensitive skin. Later my chest is rashed from the facial abrasiveness.

---

[13] A "fuck buddy" is another male you have sex with regularly. You may or may not be friends, and there is no commitment sought as a result of the liaisons.

There were many changes. I'm at a gay rodeo, and guys are dancing two-step. I've never seen anything like it. My own fear grew as my friend "John" asked me to dance. Horrified, I succumb following his encouragement. I manage to overcome the initial trauma, but it still looks and feels odd to me.

Our house is for sale, but there are no offers. House prices have dropped, and ours is apparently over priced. I still feel a lot of ambivalence about being gay, and I still struggle with seriously thinking about leaving June. Then I meet "Darren."

Darren is a chiropractor, and potentially a hot catch. He teaches me so much about what it means to be gay. Today we shop for new clothes, and a new look is created. The outside, however, is nothing compared to what is happening to me inside. I haven't felt this passionately for someone since I was twenty-two. I think I love Darren, and it seems that Darren is beginning to love me when he announces that he will be moving to Vancouver in a few months. However, he is gone within a few weeks, and so is my heart.

June and I price the house to sell, and it sells quickly. I apply to four graduate schools, hoping to attend University of British Columbia in Vancouver to reacquaint myself with Darren. That turns out to be false hope. Darren and I were finished, and my naivete delayed realizing it.

For months, I date many men, desperately seeking a life partner. Disillusionment permeates my heart. I seriously doubt if a sincere, committed relationship with a man is possible. When I least expect it, a man who I felt limerence for since meeting him a year earlier becomes dateable. Limerence transcends to love, and for the first time, I have fallen for a person who reciprocates. The love story continues. My life begins.

Upon reflection, I think love developed when I was ready to fully give it. Throughout my life, I held back from expressing my deepest tenderness toward another -- the other being a male. So often, I had felt like a person without a soul. The greatest part of me, my unobstructed ability to love another person fully, was now released from the nameless prison. My emotions are no longer serving hard time. My escape has given me a passion and a zest for life which I had never experienced earlier. Now I am out, and I am proud.

During my sojourn to the Rockies in August 1996, I wrote in my journal what I needed to accomplish to develop a positive gay identity. These were my conclusions:

1. I never wanted to be different, because different meant "less than." I changed my belief that gay is less than straight. I am equal. We are all equal, whatever our particular identity.

2. I once believed that being gay is a preference, and not an orientation. I thought my gay feelings would go away if I ignored them, and focused instead on other things, like career, and on the heterosexual lifestyle. I now believe that the only choice is whether to deal with feelings honestly, or to hide from them.

3. I realized that being gay is not evil, an abomination, or a sin. It simply is who I am, and my ability to love and feel intensely was hindered while I stayed in denial. I now believe that God created homosexuals, just as he created heterosexuals. Writers of the bible assumed that heterosexuality was the natural choice for all people. My life story rebukes this belief.

4. Being gay is not just about sexual behavior. As a man previously married, I knew that sex was only one aspect of a relationship. I would have dismissed a gay identity if it was only about sex. I knew I would not leave my wife and kids for sex. In my marriage, I had learned to minimize the importance of sex. I was not about to exalt it now. I was, and am, a person who respects and upholds commitments. As I learned that gay was about whom I can fall in love with, this understanding became my most important insight.

5. While coming out to myself, I wondered if I could continue living as a straight person although I was gay. I was afraid of anticipated social ridicule, prejudice, and discrimination. I decided that integrity was more important than comfort or safety. I was not going to let fear continue ruling the remainder of my life.

6. The stereotype of a gay male is not a positive role model, and this belief helped to keep me closeted. I thought gay men were limp-wristed, effeminate individuals who spoke with a lisp and walked with an unnatural gait. The majority do not possess these characteristics, however. The media portrayals of gays in the past were wrong.

7. I was a prisoner before coming out. There was no release valve for the undercurrent of emotion that kept rising to the surface for expression. This constant suppression left me unhappy, unfulfilled, and passionless.

8. The emotions suppressed to keep a gay self in check result in a stalemating of other emotions. For example, suppressing love and sexual attraction take so much of the artistry and passion out of life. My enjoyment of the arts has greatly increased since I came out. Before then, I did not enjoy ballet, the philharmonic, or most live theatre. Beyond love, I suppressed (more likely repressed) much of my sensitivity. I found it

hard to experience genuine empathy. Today I cry when I read about the terrible plight of others in the news, especially children. Before I could not cry. I had become more cognitive, and less joyful. Today I epitomize one of Webster's definition of the word gay: "keenly alive and exuberant."

9. Coming out began as the private process of coming to accept that I'm gay. This private process meant a lot of things had to change for me cognitively (my beliefs), affectively (learning to express long pent-up emotions and sexual desire), and behaviorally (how would I learn to act gay . . . what would this entail? How would I learn to be physical with another man?)
10. Before coming out, I could not love myself. This continued to erode my self-esteem for most of my life.

CO-RESEARCHER #1: *"MATTHEW"*

Present Occupation: Retail Manager

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
31	23	6-to-8

October 9, 1996

Matthew has become a friend over the past few months. I initially met him at a social gathering and he impressed me as a positive person. His life journey has intrigued me as I know he once planned to become a Mennonite Minister. How has he developed a positive gay identity with this type of upbringing and career aspiration?

I am feeling quite emotional while driving to Matthew's place. This is my first interview. Tears are swelling in my eyes, and I let them flow freely as they trickle down my face. This topic means a lot to me and I take it very seriously. Being gay has changed my life so significantly. Has it been this difficult for most people? Am I alone in what I have experienced?

The anxiety subsides and I become composed while walking up to Matthew's apartment. I am ready.

(adapted from journal entry, October 9, 1996).

Matthew's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *For me this would have to do with my feeling of accepting myself as gay (not wishing I were anything other than I am) as well as feeling a worthy member of society.*

Matthew's Story:

I was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. My father is a retired vice principal and teacher. My mother stayed home to raise me, my two elder sisters, and my younger brother. Religion was an integral part of my life. I grew up in the Mennonite Brethren faith, which is considered evangelical and fundamentalist. I will come back to its effect on my coming out later.

After reading your question of how I came to adopt a positive gay identity, I considered that there may be two sides to it. I think one of the sides is that I identify being a positive gay person with being a positive person in general. That has helped me out a lot. Any issue can be approached with either a positive mind set or a negative mind set. My parents, especially my dad, often ensured that things were approached positively. That was instilled with me from the beginning.

The way I can describe my story is to describe my coming out, which was a difficult process for me. One of the questions on your questionnaire asked how old I was when I was first aware that I might be gay. That would have been when I was very young, between ages six and eight. However, because I've come through a very religious background, that was always very much suppressed. That was not something talked about, and homosexuality was always viewed in my family as negative.

We moved into a new neighbourhood when I was seven. Nearby lived two brothers. The older boy, Bert, paid a lot of attention to my brother and I. We did all kinds of deviant things, like picking up butts in the alley and going through people's garbage and picking up their porno magazines. He had a fort beside his house, and we'd go in there and do stuff. We'd look at these magazines and do all the things we weren't supposed to do. Bert was entering puberty and he showed us his penis. I remember thinking *"oh my God, that thing is so huge!"* It was impressive, but I was actually more attracted to his brother.

I remember being attracted to older boys or the good-looking boys in my class, mostly because I wanted them to notice me so I would feel a part of their group, which I never felt I was. They were always athletic, and I wasn't. I was pretty innocent. That didn't stop the feelings of guilt, however.

I remember being in the locker room after gym in grade six and someone called me a fag or something like that. I was devastated. I took that really personally and I hated that feeling. Those sort of words always bothered me. I was really sensitive to that . . . perhaps overly sensitive.

In high school, I didn't know what to do with my sexual desires. I was confused. I didn't even masturbate. I tried to convince myself that I was well disciplined and that's why I didn't have desires for women. In my church sex before marriage was not considered a viable option, and it just was not practiced. I believed everything the church had to say.

I dated girls because I thought I was supposed to, but it never got past a closed-mouth kiss. Nothing ever lasted very long, and none of my dates were significant to me. There were girls that I was attracted to, but I was attracted to them more emotionally than physically.

There was definitely a reaction toward certain men, however, especially men dressed in leather. Seeing them gave me a hard on, and I felt guilty about that. I also felt deviant because I would sometimes watch them or follow them. I remember walking home or trying to time my walk home because there was a certain guy that walked the same path.

A lot of my earliest fantasies about men had to do with leather and bondage. I fantasized about tactile sensations: the feeling of the leather, the smell, and the man inside the leather. I remember being really turned on by an episode of BJ and the Bear where BJ was tied up while wearing a leather jacket.

In grade twelve, there was a group of us that went into this thing called a swing choir. I became particularly good friends with Daryl and John. The year after high school Daryl came out of the closet. I suspected that John was also gay, but he has never come out. I remember there was a bond or connection between Daryl and I, but it was never discussed. Instead we both dated girls. We were not admitting to ourselves yet.

After high school I went to Bible School for two years in Clearbrook. I lived in a dorm and I remember really worrying as my gay awareness grew. One of my very first classes in Bible School was a class called Ethics. It was obviously at the forefront of my mind because I did a paper on homosexuality. My feelings concerned me.

Between my first and second year of Bible School, I went to Germany for ten weeks on a mission. That summer was the first time I came in contact with people who had been brought up in other faiths. For the first time I put a face to different religions and I asked myself, *"why am I right? Why do I believe this?"* Simply because I was brought up believing it. I think that was the first glimpse or doubt I had about my faith.

In second year I wrote in a journal about my attraction to certain guys in the dorm. I was suffering from a lot of guilt and fear. My fears were of: (1) being sent to hell or being an evil person, (2) not being able to have a family, (3) being ridiculed if anyone knew what I was feeling, (4) losing my family, and (5) entering the gay life as I perceived it then. The stereotype I had was very vivid: a bunch of really flamboyant, effeminate perverts having thousands of sexual partners. This image insulted my moral code. Beyond morality, I was not attracted to that image either. My attractions were toward really masculine men.

I was concerned, so I spoke to one of the profs about it. He basically said this is just a phase many men go through and that I shouldn't worry about it. As I was already dating women, I thought my same-sex attraction would disappear if I fell in love. I dated Anne at that point very seriously and we had fun together. I was really attracted to her because although she was physically not really attractive, she had an outrageous sense of humor. At that point in my life I was intending to become a minister. She was also a committed Mennonite Brethren and although we got along very well, it didn't work out.

After Bible School, I attended university with a major in drama. Although there were some gay people, none of us were out, or open, about our homosexuality. We were introduced to gay writers, however. There were several gay plays that were produced in that time and I often got cast in gay roles. For example, I remember being cast as a young lover of a man in second year. I didn't want the part at all, but eventually I decided if I was going to be an actor I'd have to open myself up to many roles. So I did it and received lots of recognition for it. My part was a really touching scene that a lot of people looked at as one of the highlights of the play. The head of the department was impressed by my performance and said I'd make a very nice gay boy or something to that effect to the director. After that more parts came my way that were gay related or contained gay characters.

I felt somewhat alienated from the others at university, however, and I attributed this to the fact that I was religious. I always thought the reason why I didn't completely fit in with these people is because I didn't drink, I didn't smoke, and I didn't swear. In retrospect, I think I felt alienated because I was in the closet.

My friends and I discussed topics like racism, feminism, and homosexuality. I learned from these talks that it doesn't matter if you're gay. I developed mostly a positive view of homosexuals, even though I was still afraid of them. There was no judgement from my friends, and I began to believe that it was okay to be gay. That made it okay for me to come out to myself, and I didn't hate myself because I was gay. I think there were still lots of things to overcome, but ideologically I didn't have a problem with gay people or being gay. Guilt was what I had to get over first in order to come out, so that was very important.

My attraction to males increased in third year when I became involved in various student productions. I became more active in theatre and rehearsals were often on Sunday mornings. I stopped going to church and I pulled away from other Christian groups too as rehearsals occurred throughout the week. In my third year was the first time I smoked a cigarette because it was part of a role that I was doing. It also represented a lessening of the church's hold on me, and more of finding myself, like doing things that I wasn't supposed to do. In theatre I had a license to do the things that I wasn't supposed to do, because I wasn't being myself, I was playing another role. That was very thrilling and it wetted my appetite for other things.

I began questioning what's wrong with smoking and drinking. I went to a cast party and had a couple of glasses of champagne. I felt badly about that, but I also enjoyed the thrill immensely of having this take over my body. I had no tolerance at all and I felt "looped." Another time I got totally smashed out of my mind with scotch.

In April I directed my first major play. I picked a play by Joe Orton, who is a famous gay playwright from London, and I started to study him and read his diaries. It was the first time I read about someone who was openly gay. I read about all the sexual practices that he engaged in with his lovers and he became a hero to me. The play that I produced wasn't overtly gay, but it had a lot of gay overtones to it.

At the end of the play I called up John, a guy who starred in the play, and I asked him out for coffee. I decided that I was going to come out to him, and I hoped that something could happen between us. We went out for coffee and chatted and then when I drove him home, I told him. I'm sure I scared the shit out of him. I let him know that I was interested in spending time with him, and he made it clear that he wasn't. I felt terribly rejected. I wondered if I was completely unattractive. Why doesn't he want to be with me? I'm a nice person. At this point I admitted to myself that I was gay.

After third year I travelled throughout Saskatchewan as part of a drama tour. Martin was also on this tour, and although he was straight, I fell in love with him. He was a classically beautiful man, and we got along really well. We had done several plays together in my third year, which is when I first became attracted to him.

That summer we spent a lot of time together. He smoked, I smoked. He drank, I drank. I experienced more fun than I ever had before. I was part of the group. I wasn't living by anyone's laws or standards and I felt incredibly free.

I knew I would not be able to come out until I worked through my spiritual journey. Friends challenged my religious beliefs. For example, they asked *"why is what you're doing any different from what I'm doing? Why do you think you'll go to heaven and I won't go to heaven?"*

A major shift in my religious outlook and my thinking about it was occurring. I didn't feel accepted at church and I didn't feel a part of it. I didn't believe the same things anymore. I thought everyone was quite narrow and not willing to explore. I also felt guilty, however, because of my spirituality, not my sexuality. *"What if I'm wrong in thinking that Christianity isn't right? If it is right, then I'm on a road to hell."*

After I returned from that tour, I decided to give Christianity one last chance. That same summer was the 100th anniversary of the Mennonite Brethren in Canada, and I left on a youth mission. I felt like such a hypocrite, but I was really open and honest with people. I told people that I was going through a crisis and questioning the validity of my beliefs. The further I got into it the more I had no time for it. My attitude sucked and I couldn't wait to get home.

The summer ended, and I moved in with Martin who had asked me if I wanted to be his roommate. I think my parents were quite concerned about why I would want to leave home. I think they knew a little bit about what was going on. That autumn I rejected Christianity. I began partying a lot, went to bars a lot, and I was very involved with theatre.

I started dating a good friend of Martin's. I thought my biggest problem was that I had never slept with a woman. I thought this was the girl that I would sleep with, which was one of the main reasons why I dated her. We fooled around, but we always stopped short of having sex. One night we were naked together and we necked, petted, and I stimulated her with my fingers. She gave me a blow job but nothing happened. I felt really frustrated and guilty because I couldn't come. It dawned on me that I wasn't physically attracted to her. We broke up shortly after New Years 1989.

Martin was dating Susan at that point, and I was supremely jealous of their relationship. My relationship with Martin subsequently disintegrated and we developed a lot of animosity toward each other. I think we miscommunicated about a lot of things. Eventually he and Susan moved out. At that point I was pretty sure that I was gay.

My initial attractions for men were mostly physical, but I also wanted something emotional as well. I still had not been in love with someone who requited it. I had fallen in love with Martin, but I felt let down by him.

In August 1989, I phoned the gay line at the university and I talked to a guy there for several hours on the telephone. We arranged a meeting and I went to his place and we talked until two in the morning. The third time we got together we went to the bar. This was my first time and I was very nervous. One of the first people I saw there was someone I knew, and I sunk into the corner, hoping he wouldn't see me. I was really embarrassed. Later I started hanging out with this guy I had recognized at the bar, however. His name was Frank and he was seeing a guy named Peter. They became my first gay friends.

One night I went out I met this really hot guy who was rumored to be a porn star from San Francisco. I watched him and then we started talking. We went out to my car and smoked some hash. It really freaked me out when he put his hand on my lap. We later had another toke and eventually went to my place and smoked more. I was ready to burst sexually, and he became my first sexual partner. I don't remember much of that whole experience, but I remember coming and I felt like I had a fucking geyser coming out of me. It was such a relief. Later I felt freaked out by the experience. I didn't feel guilt, however. I knew I wanted more of this.

The second time I had sex was with a guy who wanted to fuck me. We attempted it, but it was far too painful. It wasn't a positive experience. The next weekend I went over to an older guy's house who was quite interested in me. My friends and I had talked to him at the bar, but I wasn't really interested in him. Although I didn't want to do anything with him, I craved attention from males. He started caressing me and I ended up being on his bed. As he began undressing me, I started thinking that I don't want to be here. I don't want this to happen. I had to basically fight him off. It almost turned into date rape.

That event changed things for me. I made a decision that although I was gay, it didn't mean that my life necessarily had to change. My focus would not be going to the bar every weekend. My gay identity doesn't need to be out there somewhere. Gay identity can be within who I am already and I don't have to change all aspects of myself to be gay. That summer I told three friends that I was gay and I remember talking about it with another person.

I returned to university to finish my degree in the fall of 1989. I still went out periodically, maybe once a month on average. I didn't have many sexual partners or even a lot of gay friends. I didn't really find it happening in Saskatoon, and I was busy at school. At that point my theatre lifestyle was separate from my gay lifestyle because I was not widely out yet. I didn't have any gay friends that were really serious about anything or that had any depth to them. My gay life had emerged as a shallow experience.

In 1990 I was in Vancouver during the Olympic Gay Games and I met this really interesting guy from Boston. We chatted for a long time and I realized that there were some really nice gay men out there. Meeting him was an important experience for me. I also went to a dance where there was over one-thousand gay men and it was really exciting.

I finished university in the winter of 1991 and I dated one guy for a little while, but it wasn't very meaningful. I became a bit disillusioned. I think at that point I'd only been with three other guys sexually before, and now this one. My self-image was still fairly negative. For example, I didn't feel that I was very attractive and I didn't feel that talented in the theatre group either.

I moved to Edmonton in 1991 and that's when things really changed for me. I directed a show at the Fringe Festival which had a gay theme to it, and meeting a guy there was the main catalyst for moving to Edmonton. My sister and brother-in-law invited me to move in with them, but before doing so, I came out to them in a letter. I didn't want to hide anymore as this was one of my reasons for moving. I was tired of double talk. Both of them seemed to be okay with it and I stayed with them for four months.

Then I lived with another gay person that I'd met at work. For the first time my circle of friends was largely gay. That was significant because then we could all talk about being gay and it was okay, it was normal. I worked for a retail outlet which was filled with gay men, and I was completely out at work. At that point I would no longer accept any kind of stereotypes or discrimination. I thought this is who I am and I'm allowed to be who I am. One of the first things I told people I met was that I was gay. I talked gay. I went out to the club and people were starting to find me attractive, which gave me a lot of self-confidence. I think people probably found me attractive back in Saskatoon as well, but maybe I didn't allow them to get close to me.

I also had less to lose in Edmonton. I felt freer to do whatever I wanted. I could explore whatever, and my focus had shifted from theatre. A lot of my self-image I think has come through my friends. It has affected me greatly to be around really positive, fun people.

I met two gay friends and started working with Team Edmonton, a group which was sending an athletic team to the next Olympic gay games. For the first time I had an ongoing emotional attachment to men. I was initially attracted to them physically but it turned into friendship. That really helped me feel good about myself and about being gay. I also became involved with various organizations. The guys I met were really positive, fun, and ambitious. They provided an emotional boost to me. Through it all my gay identity became stronger. Now it is who I am and anyone who's close to me has to accept that. When I sense that someone doesn't like that about me, I will not get close to them.

Coming out to others is more important for me now than ever. I want people to know that fairly early. If they can't accept that then they can't accept me. I'm not going to waste my time on those relationships. I really view it as if you can't deal with it that's your problem, it's not my problem, because I don't have a problem with this. If you have a problem, then fine, you deal with it. Go away and deal with it.

I have felt the most pride in being gay generally at quiet times. I remember one significant occasion when I was alone cleaning and tidying up at my store. I reflected on being gay. I remember thinking that I can't imagine not being gay. The thought occurred to me that being straight must be the ultimate form of self-hatred in a way, because if you refuse to make love to someone who is like yourself and that grosses you out, what does that say about how much you accept your own body? Of course I realize that everyone's sexual orientation needs to be respected. This was just a thought I had that day.

I've also felt particularly proud of being gay during gay pride days. You kind of think *"yeah, I feel a real sense of community here and I feel good about this."* I remember feeling that the first time I walked in the parade. I felt *"this is cool, we're making an impact or we're making a statement here."*

I remember visiting Vancouver in 1994. I was having coffee and thought about how much I watch my actions and my body language when I'm in Edmonton and how much freer I felt in the gay community in Vancouver. I sat with my legs crossed in a way that might be considered effeminate. At first I thought, "*oh, I shouldn't cross my legs*" and then I thought "*who cares? No-one cares here*." And that was a sense of freedom. It's small things like that. Times when I've been able to walk hand-in-hand with a guy have been significant.

My view of Christianity as a whole has changed dramatically. I wouldn't consider myself to be a Christian any longer. I have radically different views, and they are still in progress. I don't believe in heaven and hell, and I don't know if I believe in a personified God either. I don't pray because I think prayer is just a form of meditation. I think prayer changes things only in the same way meditation does. You think about things and it affects the way you go through life.

I feel very comfortable with where I am at spiritually and I feel comfortable in not knowing. I don't think that I ever will know, and I don't need to know. I think my spirituality is in what I can offer to other people that I meet and how I affect the people that I come across day-to-day. I can give them a positive energy or a negative energy. It seems to me those people who are really spiritual are those people who are really worried about what happens after this life. I'm not concerned with that. I don't believe that anything negative happens after this life. Why would it? Why would things change? Everything that decomposes turns into something else that is also useful. It has no moral value, good or bad. Because of that I don't fear death at all. If death means the end of existence and nothingness, why would I be afraid of nothing?

In my continuing growth as a gay person, I am presently looking at the role that pornography plays in my life, and whether it is a positive or a negative influence. I am questioning how it relates to my desire for the perfect male body and whether it is why I'm not with someone right now. Am I looking for an Adonis? The flip side of that is should I feel badly because I want to be with someone who is wildly attractive? One of my goals is to develop a long-term partnership with someone. I think that will be really important for my gay identity, and for my identity . . . period.

What bothers me about my family is that they don't accept my homosexuality. I wonder how they will accept someone who eventually becomes my permanent lover or partner. My parents will have to adjust.

Another question I have is whether I owe something to the gay community. I feel a sense that I need to give back something. I think in some sense I need to share my self with others and my experiences with others, or just my support. I have a sense of that.

DIARY ENTRIES

Matthew lent me the diary that he kept from July 3, 1988 through July 30, 1990. I have quoted below a few selections from his diary which I think were particularly salient in his coming out and later developing a positive gay identity.

> July 27, 1988
>
> *I had a very erotic dream last night -- homosexual. For some reason, I was kissing Jack Smith very passionately -- french kissing -- and he reciprocated as passionately as I. It proceeds along and I had anal intercourse with him (at which point, of course, I had a wet dream). When he began to do the same to me, I woke up immediately. It felt too gross up my bum. This scares me. Why do I have these dreams and why do they affect me so much? I don't want to be gay . . . . I cannot get over these feelings . . . .*
>
> *I keep praying aloud and then feel like a hypocrite. What is going on. Why am I here? I sure don't feel like a Christian and I'm becoming unable to pretend well . . . . Christianity more and more seems to be an answer for people who don't think very deeply -- or who want simple answers for rather complex questions. But that sounds pompous and conceited.*
>
> September 13, 1988
>
> *I sat beside a guy in my Philosophy of Sexuality class today and I found myself weighing the possibilities of being laid by him -- and I really don't want it. I just have these urges. He had long, blonde hair and just looked cool. But then, I really miss Janet and want to be with her too. And yet, I still have this hold of Christianity over me. I think that deep inside I truly have a conservative morality and I feel a lot of guilt about the urges I have . . . . Sometimes I just wish I would be approached by a good-looking, nice homosexual who would teach me about sex -- who would have sex with me -- but I'm too scared.*
>
> October 16, 1988
>
> *I need to stop being so timid with women -- I need to think of them more romantically than as merely friends.*
>
> December 29, 1988
>
> *I've had a lot of homosexual thoughts, dreams, and fantasies in the last while. But maybe those are a part of my defenses as well* [in reference to a woman he was dating]. *Maybe I think that if I was gay I wouldn't get hurt. I don't know, I just about called the gay hotline tonight. But I don't want to be gay.*
>
> March 29, 1989
>
> *Am I gay? I'm pretty sure I am. I need some help. I need someone to talk to -- someone I can trust . . . . I feel isolated.*

March 30, 1989

I'm really unsettled about this homosexuality bit. I'm pretty sure that I am, but then when I think about it, I sure would like just a normal family with children some day.

April 12, 1989

When I am honest with myself, though, I must admit that I am more sexually stimulated by men than women. I just don't know how to deal with all of the expectations that society, family, and friends, not to mention my own expectations, have on me. Which friends would I lose if I told them of my homosexuality? How would my family react? Would they want me around? Would my sister and brother-in-law allow me to be around their kids? There is a lot of paranoia surrounding homosexuality that I must be prepared to face if I engage in fulfilling my actual desires.

June 3, 1989

I'm starting to feel comfortable with the concept that I'm gay . . . . I still think that if the right wonderful woman would come along, I could have a relationship with her, but I feel like that would be unlikely.

July 11-12, 1989

I've been too proud to admit what I am for this long and it hasn't gotten me any happier so I'll just slide in to this thing [referring to interest Matthew has in another male], *so to speak, and see how he responds -- God, I hope he wants me. I wonder why he was so eager to see me . . . or was I misinterpreting? We'll see.*

July 12, 1989

I wonder if I'm blocking possible experiences with women by convincing myself I'm gay. I've got to get straightened out!

August 31, 1989

I know now that I am gay and I am starting to be able to really admit that to myself. I think it's time to tell a few close friends like Joyce and Karen and to see how they will accept it.

September 20, 1989

First of all, I have had sex. I guess with two men now . . . . After I felt really shitty about it, but now, like I said, it was like a fantasy.

September 25, 1989

All day today I couldn't concentrate because I was thinking about him [referring to a guy Matthew met in an Edmonton gay nightclub]. *He is the first man since I've come out that I've truly been interested in and who there is a chance with. This is crazy -- being infatuated with a man who lives five hours away. How can I explain the trips there? But somehow it has to work. Or at least work itself out. Oh God, I want him bad.*

May 17, 1990

I think I take things too seriously too quickly. For Clark [a guy Matthew was interested in], *it's a point against me to not have had a relationship before. But I want to be with someone who is thoughtful and who values relationships.*

CO-RESEARCHER #2: *"PETER"*

Present Occupation: Legal/Business Consultant

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
39	32	12

Recollections, June 20, 1997

Walking into his office captivated my attention. The decor suggested affluence, and his presence echoed influence. There are few people I've met who look as distinguished as Peter. A fellow psychologist suggested I meet with him for some marketing advice regarding the gay community. Our connection was immediate.

Peter and I subsequently became friends. Peter's coming out was tumultuous, and ultimately part of his healing journey. Our interview occurred on October 20, 1996.

Peter's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *Sense of self-acceptance, sense of pride, the absence of shame for being gay. Being unapologetic for one's gayness. Knowing that you can do anything you want to do. Being free of stereotypes.*

Peter's Story:

I had a very big aversion to homosexuality when I was growing up. When I was nine-years old, I was in the showers at a public swimming pool and an old creepy man began molesting me. He wore coke bottle glasses, a wrinkled raincoat, and basically looked like the stereotype of a paedophile. He stuck his hands down my swimming trunks. I told the lifeguard, who then phoned the police. I was incredibly traumatized, not by the incident, but by the justice system. I was subpoenaed as a witness for the prosecution and I had to describe in intimate, humiliating detail this whole incident. I also had to describe my body parts. In those days they did not clear out courtrooms for child molestation charges. There were kids my own age in the courtroom watching for the sheer entertainment. It was the traditional defense of the day to suggest that the kid was lying. The man was acquitted because there were no witnesses to the incident. I felt humiliated and degraded in a public forum. As a lawyer today, I realize it was an evidentiary acquittal and not because I wasn't believed, but nobody told me that at the time. It was one of the most traumatic experiences of my life and at the end I felt I had lost because nobody believed me.

Why I am telling you about this event is that at no time was the term paedophile used. It had always been ingrained in me that this horrible, evil man that had violated me was a gay man, a homosexual, a fag, an old queer. I remember all the terms that were used. I had been fruited up. There was no distinction made back then that this man was a paedophile, and even my mother told me that this is what queer people do.

In retrospect, I realize I had homoerotic feelings when I was 12-or-13 years old. For example, I used to be a competitive swimmer. My favourite part of competitive swimming was the locker rooms afterwards where all the boys were changing. All these little naked wieners flopping around was exciting to watch, but it was nothing that I identified as sexual or homoerotic. After I came out, I reviewed my memory of these early sensations and I now understand that I was sexually excited. The ability to deny in the human mind still surprises me. I had been able to contort logic and somehow rationalize that these feelings I had were not homoerotic. That, after all, would have insinuated that I was a fag.

I remember being in Radium Hot Springs with my grandfather. We were in the changing room and I saw boys that were a little older than I was, fifteen, sixteen and they were naked and I remember getting very excited about this. It scared the hell out of me because people had told me by my having been molested by this old man, it would be a real struggle now to make sure that I didn't turn out like he did. It was believed that if you were molested by an older queer, you'd grow up to be queer.

I also remember finding a Playboy in Dad's den. One issue had a movie review in it and there were photos of women removing a guy's clothes. It was the only picture of a male penis that I'd seen in Playboy. That edition of the magazine gave me hours of pleasure. I'd go off masturbating to my little heart's content out in some cubbyhole in our house, but I would not have acknowledged that that particular issue of Playboy excited me so much because it had the scene of the naked man in it.

My family of origin was very dysfunctional. My mother was and still is severely mentally ill, and my family goes to great efforts to make my mother appear normal to the outside world. We would love to portray this picture of the Walton family to everyone. Her sadism and cruelty were really quite extraordinary. She knows I have a fatal allergy against peanuts, but ever since I was a little kid, and to this day, she offers me peanuts and peanut butter baking. She has been trying to kill me since I've been a little kid. I was very fond of my hamsters, and she would kill them and do things like that to taunt and ridicule me. She always waited until I got very attached to something before taking it away. She still hates me. I go there and there's still crazy making.

I saw very little of my father when I was very young. He was a printer at the time and would often sleep at the shop. I think he did it partly to get away from my mom. In a weak moment only a few years ago, he cried one day and admitted that he never understood why mother hated me so much.

I left home at about 16, and I would have become a street kid if I'd not been as smart as I was. I found acceptable ways to be out in the streets. I found that government programs and scholarships and things were the way instead of stealing or working on the streets, so I ended up getting money in other ways.

I became very well educated. I earned a BA in political science, two law degrees, and fulfilled most of the requirements for a MA in political science.

I married when I was 21-years old after a long engagement. Jane visited me in London while I worked on my first law degree. We married, she returned to Canada after ten days, and I didn't see her for another two years. It seemed like a perfect arrangement. When I got home it became more problematic, although I was able to perform heterosexually. We had 12 years together, and I felt increasingly unable to continue.

I never remember fantasizing about Jane's breasts or her vagina or anything like that. Did I like feeling her breasts? I could have shaken her hand and gotten the same kind of jollies out of it. Did I like going down on her vagina? No thank you, I didn't really like it very much at all, but it sure made her squeal and that made me happy. The physical responses and emotional responses from Jane is what turned me on.

I became an owner of a very popular gay bar around 1987. I tried to make the gay club a clean, drug-free, abuse-free type of place. The patrons, however, didn't want that. They liked the drugs, the poppers, and all the rest of it. This was part of the scene. I realized the place was very unhealthy, and I didn't want to be a part of it. I gave ownership of the bar to the general manager in 1992. I said it's yours, and I walked away.

Owning the club and trying to make it a healthy place was probably about the worst thing I could have done to start my coming out, but it was the only place I knew that gay people congregated. Who did I meet at the club? I met the *nellie*[14] drag queens, the leather queens, the drug abusers, the drunks, and the promiscuous types. I understood intellectually that gay people were not wrinkled old men with coke bottle glasses that molested little boys, but I didn't feel it yet in my heart. I met just about every possible negative stereotype of gays . . . people that hung around toilets, people that went to the baths and participated in frequent self-destructive activities[15]. I even entertaiЯed the idea for a while that maybe that's what I had to become. The only thing that saved me from going into that life is because I was so afraid of being gay in the first place, I just decided to shut everything down.

The difference between my feelings for men as compared to women really hit me while I was still married. When I was a little kid, I remember a scene from a movie where a little girl asks her mom, *"how do I know when I'm in love?"* Mom replies, *"oh honey, believe me you'll know. You won't be able to eat, you won't be able to sleep, you'll think of nothing else but that person.*" And then of course the young teenage girl says well then I think I'm in love. That image has stuck with me for my whole life. I remember Jane and I discussing this scene from the movie, both agreeing that it was a crock because neither of us had any recollection of feeling that way when we "fell in love."

Then one year I met Bob and we fell in love. And I couldn't eat and I couldn't sleep and I couldn't think of anything else but wanting to be with him. For the first time in my life I really felt head over heels, passionately in love. Every waking moment was spent thinking about Bob and he felt the same about me. I finally realized that old movie didn't mislead us. That is how you feel when you fall in love. And I finally realized that I never had really fallen in love. I thought I had because I was very fond of Jane and she was female, therefore this must be love. But when I really fell in love with someone, I thought *"Oh my God!"*

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[14] *Nellie* is a colloquial term meaning "effeminate."

[15] I do not consider "nellie" people as "negative stereotypes," only "stereotypes per se." I want to emphasize that being effeminate is not a bad thing . . . only adopting behaviors because you think you "should," rather than because it's who you "are." I also do not consider people who go to baths, clubs, or toilets as "bad" either . . . only people who are stereotypical and self-destructive in their behavior.

I started fantasizing about Bob every time I masturbated or had sex with Jane. I woke up in the morning with a smile on my face thinking of Bob. I went to sleep with a smile on my face thinking of Bob. Sexual relations with my wife became irritating because it distracted me from what I really wanted to think about.

In order to build a positive gay identity, I had to go through a total break with my old life. I was feeling immensely unhappy, and I didn't know why. I was always an overachiever throughout my life and I kept myself incredibly busy. I was running, running, running. In retrospect, I now know what I was running from.

The critical point occurred when I was around 30-years old. I would just sit in my room and sob for no reason at all. There were many emotions that were trying to get out, and I couldn't identify the cause. I would chastise myself for feeling unhappy because to everyone else I had reached the pinnacle of success in my career. Everything that everyone else thought would be a good thing to have, I had already achieved. I wasn't just a lawyer, I was the highest-ranking lawyer in the province. I held a judicial type position within the legislature.

Eventually I was in such pain, I unwittingly began doing self-destructive things. I realize I was trying to kill myself when by the fifth time in a month I'd seen a red light and just continued driving on, seeing it as green in my mind, knowing it was red, but seeing it as green. It was like the movies where everybody just barely misses one another by an inch. I'd stop and I'd say I knew that light was red, so why did my mind interpret it as green?

I remember occasions where I would take my asthma pills in the morning, and later realize that I had already taken my required dose five times earlier, not remembering each time that I had done so. I realized I'm doing some very strange things, and I wondered why. In retrospect, I realize I had been trying to kill myself, but I certainly didn't dream of doing such a thing at a conscious level.

I was very much in love with Bob, without acknowledging that it was a love feeling. Admittedly, Bob was one of the craziest people I'd ever met. He was a strong Mormon who was having trouble with his own sexuality. He had been in and out of youth detention centers and all that stuff. He had a very hard time fitting into his family's idea of the good Mormon.

We both managed to contort reality and rationalize why we were both sucking each other's wieners for so long. I mean this really wasn't homosexuality. Bob was and still is in denial. We managed to rationalize it wonderfully. This was just a guy thing, this was just a whatever. I mean I don't know how many guys suck each other's wieners. But this was the amount of denial with which we were both quite adept, and we fed off each other. We affirmed that this really wasn't gay, this was just fooling around.

One night when I felt at the lowest depths of despair I called Bob to ask him if we could meet somewhere. I don't know why I called him other than I felt he might have more experience feeling despair than anyone else I knew. I told Bob that I felt strange, and I started sobbing. He said you can't do this alone and he recognized that I was taking the responsibility of the world on my shoulders. He suggested that I see his psychologist. Phoning him was the hardest call I ever made in my life, but I soon began the long psychotherapy process.

After nattering at my therapist for the first half hour, he said I struck him as a man who's ready to take his own life. I stopped. No one had ever confronted me with that question. I mean I knew about my self-destructive behavior, but I didn't view it as suicidal. Once it dawned on me that I was suicidal, it was a real struggle to continue living. I'd look at those razor blades and I'd look at those pills and it was tempting. I would not allow it to break me, however, as I'd always had a very strong spirit. I had two choices -- either to kill myself or to see if maybe there was another alternative. It was just the fact that I felt so much pain by not doing something that I did do something.

After this first visit with my psychologist, my wife and I decided to part ways for reasons unrelated to my emerging sexuality. We agreed to separate on a trial basis because we were both unhappy and we were going in different directions. I didn't want to drag her down with what I felt would become a tumultuous event in my life. Furthermore, I didn't want her to see me fail. I had never failed in anybody's eyes, and I felt that I was just about ready to lose it. I didn't want anybody to see it. She was going through similar issues as well, and later accepted her own homosexuality. We had been high school sweethearts, so we found something in common with each other. We were probably both harbouring gay feelings at the time.

My therapist felt from day one that I was gay. I would start talking about Bob and losing him and I'd start sobbing. He knew I was in love with him. He slowly started planting the seed that healthy gay people are people that you wouldn't spot on the street as any different from anyone else. After about eight months of therapy, I finally came to the conclusion that I was in a gay relationship.

My life became completely dismantled through the two years of therapy. I had left the warmth and security of a marriage, and I dropped the multitude of friends who used me because of my power and financial success. They were not going to tolerate me changing the "*always obliging, always successful, never failing, always helpful, always will carry me if I need to be carried type of person*" that I had been up to that point. The only way I could come out and see what I wanted was to get rid of all the people who were very much desirous of me being what they wanted. That was probably the most traumatic part of my coming out and developing a positive gay identity . . . there were so many people whom I would disappoint. There was also a total dismantling of any relationship with my family. Nobody liked the changes that were happening.

During my therapy, I became a voracious reader, and I picked up every reputable, modern book on homosexuality. The first thing I had to do was rid myself of the negative images and the stereotypes. I needed to put a face on healthy gay people. I read a study that was carried out by some Chicago polling firm that did a survey on Americans living in different parts of the United States. The people that were most homophobic, that had the most virulently hateful views about gay people were also the very same people who did not believe that they knew any gay people.

This demonstrated to me that it's much easier to hate a group if they don't have a face. The minute you know your neighbour or your daughter or your son or your mailman or your butcher is gay, all of a sudden if you like that person you've got a real dilemma to deal with. Once I began to accept that I could in fact be a normal person, and not adopt a bunch of affectations and unhealthy behavior and stuff like that, coming out became possible. Toward the end of the therapy I felt strong enough to step down from my prestigious high-powered job, and I resigned.

For a while I was quite elated that I was gay. I thought I'm really different, but a difference that's in my control about how I behave. All of a sudden everything became so easy. I was so tired of contorting reality to make it appear that I was straight when I was obviously doing gay behavior. Then I started to come out to people. In one book I read, the author wrote that when you start developing a positive gay identity, you will want to come out because you won't like the dishonesty anymore. That's exactly what happened. Nobody wanted me to come out. Nobody asked me to come out. Hadn't I lied for enough years?

I invited my parents over one afternoon and I left a copy of the Advocate magazine (a gay publication) on the table. My father picked it up and looked at it and kind of threw it back. I said *"oh, that's the Advocate. Are you wondering why I have a copy of that?"* *"Well, we weren't, we weren't,"* says my father, knowing full well it's because I'm gay. I told them that *"yes, I am."* And that was it. The first thing my mother said was *"well, is Jane a lesbian?"* And I said *"you'll have to ask her about that, I don't know."* My parents were some of the first people to whom I disclosed.

What I became was militantly honest. I just despised and to this day despise dishonesty in everything because I lied for so much of my life and it took such a great toll. If I have a positive gay image, it's because I have a real sense of honesty. I don't think it's a positive gay self image at all, but rather a positive image of the truth.

I'm out to everybody. I don't care who knows when it comes up naturally. I don't force the subject. When I left the legislature I gave a radio interview to CKUA and gave a few parting shots at the government about the way they handle gay rights. Although the MLA's are all good people, even the homophobic ones, they don't know any better. They always had a hard time reconciling me with homosexuals because I didn't fit the image that they had of this faceless group. I had a face and they liked me and yet I was homosexual. I began to see how everybody else went to great lengths to contort reality to suit their needs, which is what I had been doing for so many years.

I was so tired of all the contorting we do in life, every day. I was determined that I was going to call a spade a spade. And when I saw that people had a hard time dealing with that, I began to realize that it was their problem, not my problem. I didn't have to make it easy on people for them to handle my being gay. I used to think how can I tell this to people so they won't overreact and as I began to realize that if I was doing that, I was playing into their game. I was taking ownership of their inability to deal with it.

If you're gay[16], nothing you can say will make you less gay or moderately gay. A good analogy is the idea of being a little bit pregnant. You are gay or you're not. I don't like black and white images, but if you finally identify yourself as "gay" then say you're gay.

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[16] I believe "gay" people are those who identify as gay. They prefer same-sex relationships on an emotional, spiritual, and/or physical basis. I also believe bisexuals exist, but they rarely identity as "gay."

I thought the world would end if I came out, but it didn't. That's what I was afraid of. There have been some very negative experiences with my life since coming out. In fact, everything that's happened to me from a romantic point of view has been negative. That hasn't dissuaded me, however. I do have odd doubts, thinking maybe I would have been better to play the game and be what people wanted me to be. Then I think about it for two minutes and I say nah, it's not worth going back to the dishonesty.

Since coming out, I have had two relationships end solely because my partners could not handle their gayness. My first relationship was with Richard. He wanted his girlfriend to make a good show in front of his family, and he wanted me to take care of his physical and emotional needs. I said no way. Soon after this confrontation, he reconciled with his girlfriend, they engaged the same day, and they married about a month later. I haven't heard from him since.

I'm still in a grieving period over my last relationship, but I'm not letting it take me down. I had known Frank for years before we became intimate emotionally and sexually. After many months together, he began going through the same thing Richard did. Frank wanted me to butch it up and play it absolutely straight so that we would appear to others as simply good buddies, even though maybe an hour before we'd been in bed making passionate love. This bothered me, the whole idea that I was not able to acknowledge the special place that he had in my life. Here I'd spent an entire lifetime coming out of the closet, getting rid of the lies and Frank was trying to push me back in. I'm not going to be anybody's dirty little secret.

Frank panicked because suddenly he realized he was in a monogamous gay relationship. He told me that I'm expecting too much. That infuriated me. I am not expecting too much. To suggest that because we're gay we shouldn't expect the same fulfilment out of a relationship as straight people is ludicrous.

After leaving the legislature, I started the company I have right now which is immensely successful and humane. It's the most basic tenant. This is another club for me, but one that's within my control, without the addiction issues and stuff. Everybody there is so accepting and it's a very nice environment to work. A gay identity, a positive gay identity occurs as strongly in a heterosexual context as it does in a gay context. You don't have to go to a gay place to express your positive gayness.

If there's some reason for the gay issue to come up when dealing with a vendor, we make them aware that these are gay dollars. For example, we forced companies to change their policies regarding same-sex spousal benefits if they wanted our account. I've got so much surplus money now that I gave a few thousand dollars to a gay group in Ottawa to help push through the federal equal rights bill. I have given tens of thousands of dollars to other pro-gay groups as well. This is where I realize my positive gay identity. The surplus money goes to gay causes. I could work hours and hours as a volunteer and not achieve the same level of accomplishment that I do now by being able to throw a few thousand bucks at some project that is near and dear to my heart. I'm able now to be a bit of a philanthropist in the gay community.

Although I did not have a positive gay role model, I feel touched that I have been one to a number of others. I have received a few letters from men thanking me for helping them to come out. Through my visibility, others have found it easier because they learned that they didn't have to fit the negative gay stereotypes. I feel so proud when somebody tells me I had a positive influence on them. One of my major beefs concerns the lack of role models for gay boys growing up or girls growing up. Straight boys have Arnold Schwarzenegger, Wayne Gretzky, Magic Johnson, whatever. All we had were negative, horrible stereotypes. If there were gay portrayals at all, they were sneaky, effeminate, stereotypical negative gays and they all affirmed the stereotypes of this guy that molested me when I was nine-years old.

Presently, my biggest issue as a gay man is that I'm very lonely, and I'm concerned that I'm not going to find someone as positive as me. My happiness is not at its highest, but am I depressed about it? No. Am I willing to back down on my positive gay identity? No. The three men I have had relationships with are gay, but neither have come to terms with it. Can I really blame them? I didn't come out until I was 32 or 33. They haven't hit that stage yet. I know that I will never settle for a poor relationship. I'm talking about a committed, proud relationship with someone who is healthy, who is self-aware, and who has gotten ridden of the self-loathing.

Perhaps these types of individuals are right around me, but I'll never know them. We can be invisible to each other. If he really is healthy and doesn't have any affectations or signals that give an indication of his sexual orientation, I am obliged to assume he is probably straight. Likewise, he is obliged in the absence of such signals to assume that I am straight. We may be perfect for each other but we'll never know it because we live in a predominantly heterosexual dominated world, and that's very sad. That's the realization that they may be around and I'll never know it.

I really hope that I'm going to have a relationship, that's what keeps me going. It will be an affirmation of these things that I know in my heart to be true. Eventually you need to taste the pudding, the proof is in the pudding. That being said though, in the meantime, I think a person with a positive gay identity can do so much right now because there are so many people without a positive gay identity. What I do is I send virtually thousands of dollars to something that I feel has done something worthwhile for gay people. I can't think of a more positive contribution to my community, or my humanity, than to put a face on gay people.

CO-RESEARCHER #3: *"FRANK"*

Present Occupation: Accountant

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
37	24	16

Recollections, June 25, 1997

My partner, "Ken," knows quite a few people in the gay community, and he suggested that Frank might be a suitable co-researcher. Frank has actively volunteered for a number of years with a gay organization in Calgary. After meeting him initially, I was impressed by his matter-of-fact manner and by his level-headedness. He is proud of who he is. After Frank agreed to participate, I interviewed him at his home on October 26, 1996.

Frank's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *Personal comfort in disclosing your homosexuality to all that you encounter, pride in yourself as being a good person, and an ability to act as an ambassador and advocate for gay acceptance within your sphere of influence.*

Frank's Story:

I was born in New Brunswick, but my family lived in Austin, Texas during my first five years. My father, an alcoholic, was apparently drinking and hanging out at the press club there, and he was eventually transferred back to Saint John. I guess he was someone who slept around. My parents separated and divorced when I was 12-or-13 years old.

My dad and I didn't have a good relationship. After my parents separated, my dad moved back to Texas. I'd receive an annual Christmas gift from him, but there was no communication between us to any degree other than the odd letter. There was a period of about four or five years when I hadn't heard from him at all. I felt that he had more interest in my sister. Although I can say that our relationship was probably fair until the separation, it was poor to bad afterwards.

My mother was the caregiver, the one who was always there for us. She'd do the housework, the cooking, the nurturing, the health care, the whole nine yards. There's no better mother on the entire planet and that's how I feel. It's always been that way. When my parents separated, she was left with having to work at low-paying jobs. My grandparents were fairly well off and they were always there for us, however. I had good family support growing up.

I didn't respect my sister in my younger years because I felt she wasn't respecting my mother. We always had communication problems and probably more fights than average siblings. As time progressed, she became quite accepting of my being gay, and was proud to tell it to anybody who she felt should know. She's actually been quite a positive support for me.

I attended a Catholic all-boys school during my elementary years. I started having feelings of being gay, or different, when I was quite young. Hockey and other sports did not interest me. My small group of friends enjoyed role playing and acting out in other ways that were totally different from what most peers did.

I became aware of my attractions for males at around age sixteen. Magazines like Penthouse indicated that it was quite normal to have these feelings as a younger male and that there's nothing wrong with that. Consequently, I thought that this was just a stage or phase in my development.

I think I was uncomfortable with issues of sex. I also don't think I was in touch with my feelings. I was not aware of homoerotic feelings at all before age sixteen. I had some curiosity issues and I might play in the park with the boys, but I didn't experience any kind of sexual thinking at that point.

My developing feelings for men were not directed toward television stars, actors, or passing strangers. It would always be with one of my close friends. For example, my erotic dreams would sometimes include this friend and create a situation where we were both naked together.

Somewhere between age 17 and 19, I became sexually active with women. I never slept around much, perhaps having had four women in total. I enjoyed the sex, but I still had ongoing desires or curiosities about men. At about 19 or 20 I had my first homosexual experience. As time progressed, the feelings and thoughts I had for men intensified. As I started hanging out with gay friends, learning about the culture, and actually dating and being sexually intimate with men, I began identifying the feelings that I had over the past ten years.

I met Carol in grade eleven, and we dated for four years. I wouldn't say that I was head over heels in love with her. I was wondering how to get out of that relationship because I didn't think this was a partner for matrimony.

I took an opportunity to go to Europe to work. That was when I had my first gay experience of any significance. I arrived in a town and I asked a guy and a girl for directions to my hotel. A few minutes after leaving them, the same guy drove up in his car and offered me a ride. I said *"sure, that's great."* After some preliminary conversation, he told me that the train station was a hang out for gay people. The next thing you know there's some touching and feeling going on and he's asking me if I want to go back to his place. I agreed, but as we're driving to his place, I'm thinking that I am going to be killed. It was a long drive and we were getting further and further away from where I was supposed to be. I thought they'd never find me. This guy was a rugby player, and I wondered if maybe he's a basher or something like that. Obviously, that wasn't the case at all. Mostly I felt excited.

This was the first time I'd ever kissed a man. I felt very odd about it. It seemed so unusual. It took me a while to assimilate that and to say *"ok, that wasn't so bad."* The experience had no emotional meaning at all. It was an act, it was an illicit thing as far as I was concerned. Following the encounter, I didn't think much about the person at all.

The place I was billeted had a young man my age, and I thought he was interesting but he had a girlfriend whom I was more interested in. I told him that I liked his girlfriend and he said you can have her if you want. The involvement with my billeted friend's girlfriend was just a foolish kind of touching thing.

I returned to university after the Europe trip. At this point Carol and I had broken up. I didn't date anybody or do anything for a year or so. Then I started dating another girl, Beth, who was in my class. We weren't sexually active until a year and a half into our relationship. We had sex just once. She was a virgin and had never had sex, but she wanted to try it, so she negotiated it with me. It was all very kind of formal. It wasn't completely satisfying because she was as nervous as hell.

About twenty or thirty of us decided we were going to treat ourselves to a trip to Florida after we graduated. We arranged this big trip and there were a ton of us that went down. We'd party on the beach and go out to the different clubs and drink beer and have a good time. There was a poster in one of the straight bars talking about a big night at the Copa, which was a gay bar. I was interested in going, but Beth and I were still seeing one another and she was down there with me. One night I hopped in a cab and arrived at this huge pink palatial place and I told the cabbie that he had the wrong place. I was expecting some dark, seedy alley with all kinds of strange people around and this was a well lit, beautiful, palatial building. He said this is the Copa.

The moment I walked in the door, it was like a dawning, a revelation. Here was this high energy place with a thousand gay men. It was a huge bar and I really enjoyed myself. At this point I'd never even considered that there were that many more people like me. I'd never really thought about being gay.

I found myself very comfortable and really enjoying being in that environment. At that point I really had to start accepting a lot of the feelings that I'd been having since age sixteen. When the night was over, I had an experience with one person I was interested in. We had sex and I found that quite rewarding. Since I didn't go home that night, I had some stories to tell the next day to my roommates. I felt very guilty about the fact that I was still dating Beth. I ended up telling her what I had done the night before. She was immediately shocked and at the same time curious -- like what's going on with you? The next night we went to the Copa together and we had a good time. After we left she said it was too much for her to assimilate and she felt it best if we didn't see one another. We broke up, and months later I discovered that she had been a lesbian.

Since returning from Florida, I started working and going to the gay bar in Saint John. I was concerned about being identified in the place, of being identified as a homosexual, and that made it uncomfortable for me to be gay in Saint John. At this point my family didn't know, my straight friends and school friends didn't know, and certainly work didn't know. I had no intention of letting them know either. I'm still like that to a degree. I wish I weren't. I wish I were more open with everybody that I encounter. It's one of the things that I will evolve to.

My experience in Florida led me to identify as gay. I'd made the transition. There were times even after I came out to myself that I had an experience with another woman or two, but they were aware that I was gay.

I didn't have to correct any stereotypes in my thinking. I wasn't exposed to much discussion or much information about what being gay was or what the stereotypes of being gay were prior to coming out. Consequently, there weren't too many things that I had to overcome.

As kids, people call you a sissy or a faggot or cocksucker or whatever they say but it meant nothing to me. It was no different from calling someone any derogatory name that has no meaning to someone who's really young. Eventually somebody tells you what being a fag means. As you get a little older, you're watching the news coverage and you see dykes on bikes and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in the parades and stuff like that. I never felt that all gay people dressed up in dresses or wore wigs. I never had any real stereotypes like that. The only stereotype I would have had is that gay people have some effeminate characteristics. I still believe that most effeminate men are probably gay.

The first relationship that I had was with a guy named Brad and that lasted for five-to-seven months. It was a predominantly sexually-based relationship as far as I was concerned. My sister found out that I was dating him through a work associate. She came home and told my mother. Mom said "*your sister has told me some very disturbing news and I want you to tell me what's going on*." So I told her.

Prior to this event I guess I had some questions about the normality of being gay. I had gone on my own to see a psychiatrist and I had a very interesting chat with him. He was asking me questions like "*well, do you have any difficulty socializing, do you have any trouble sleeping, or do you have health issues surrounding your being gay?*," and all of my answers were no. He said "*well, you really don't have a problem of a psychological nature whatsoever. If you're thinking that being gay is a mental illness, it's not. If you're having any problems accepting yourself for being gay then you've got a problem to discuss*."

After my mother found out, her first reaction was "*we should get you to a psychiatrist or a psychologist*." She worked in the medical community and knew the doctor that I'd seen. He's quite reputable, so she thought about it a little longer and her main concern became my happiness and my health. She was concerned that growing up without the love of children would be a hardship to me in future years and she was also aware of the societal problems that I might experience, but she was very loving, caring, compassionate, and understanding. I was very lucky to have that type of nurturing mother relationship. At this point my father was divorced from my mother.

My next relationship was with John, and although I thought I loved him, I'm unsure. He was probably 17 or 18 when we started dating, and all my friends thought I was nuts. I liked his company and enjoyed the intimacy that we had. When it came up to summer he decided to find a job in Toronto. That was his exit. I heard back through the grapevine that he was actually on the streets. He was hooking, which was devastating to me. I couldn't understand how that could happen because I thought that we'd had a reasonably good relationship. After a couple of years I found out that he was HIV positive through these endeavours in Toronto and he's now dead. There's no opportunity for any reconciliation.

I met Rob a few months later. About a year after we started dating, I was offered a transfer out west. After working in Calgary for three months, I decided to invite Rob to join me. We were together for almost eight years before breaking up. It was a very hard break up because we both had strong feelings for one another, and we had co-ownership in a house and we'd accumulated all kinds of things together. It was very stressful for both of us. Since then, we haven't been good at communicating with one another. There's still too many feelings on both sides.

We had many things in common. We also had many arguments. I always felt that he was a very outgoing, vivacious, interesting funny type of guy. In terms of us as a couple it was always Rob and Frank, not Frank and Rob, that type of thing. I felt that my identity was being subdued. I wasn't getting treated the way I felt I should be treated in a relationship that had been going on that long. I didn't feel equal at all.

My relationship with Rob was very good for the most part. I was very proud of the fact that we had had a long-term relationship and that we'd built a nice house together. We had met a certain circle of friends and I felt that we were respected as a couple. I think a lot of people looked up to us as role models. This is what other people aspired to get to -- to have a loving, nurturing relationship.

In the bar world the common perception is that there are no long-term relationships. My retort is you don't see the long-term relationships because they haven't got the foolishness to come to the bar when they're in one.

I have a penchant for young men which is probably going to get me in trouble in the long run. My most recent relationship was with a twenty-year-old. We had some trust issues and we also had incompatibilities about how to spend our time together. He wanted to spend all of his time alone with me, whereas I wanted to include friends in some of our activities.

Presently, my most important quest as a gay man is to find a mate. When I hopefully find that special person, I will be totally comfortable in that relationship. At that point I'm hoping that I'll be able to not give a damn about who knows. I want to be an advocate in some regards to the fact that homosexuality is normal in the spectrum of human relations. I want people to look to me as somebody who's gay and who is a decent person.

It's so hard for me to separate a gay issue from a non-gay issue. They're just issues for me. My relationships are gay relationship issues and I've had some relationship problems in this past year or two. I do not like being alone, I want to be in a relationship. I want to find someone who I can love, who's going to love me back, who I can cherish and who I can be proud of and display and grow with and learn from.

I have volunteered for gay-related causes for a number of years. I have been involved in a number of gay social organizations as well. I'm comfortable in a gay environment because nobody is going to give me a hard time about being gay.

I would like to get to the point where I'm completely out at work. That would be a nice goal, a nice achievement. Right now, however, I hope to advance in my career and I just don't see the benefit of telling anybody I'm gay.

I sometimes think I would like to be a gay politician, somebody who was a joining agent for the gay and lesbian population across Canada and the world. To be an advocate and an ambassador, that type of thing. I often feel that we have political clout and we just don't use it. There is infighting between gays and lesbians which strikes me as completely asinine. We have so much in common and yet there's so much friction between our two groups.

I would say the largest part of my identity is the fact that I'm gay, but that is still not what makes me who I am. What makes me who I am is the fact that I'm this or I do that or I enjoy this, but for me I guess I haven't found something that I identity with more strongly than being gay. If somebody asked me what's the most important thing you want to tell me about yourself, I wouldn't tell them I'm a New Brunswicker and I wouldn't tell them I'm an accountant for an oil company. To try and define who I am first and foremost you need to know that I'm a gay man. I don't know if that's right or wrong but that's just the way it is with me.

When I was growing up, my family tried to instill what being a good human being is. I've taken that and added the fact that I am gay. To be a good person means being a positive person and means having a positive gay identity. It's not specific to being gay in and of itself. It's just being happy with your lot in life and helping others and just being a good person. If you're gay while you happen to be doing that then you've got a positive gay identity.

CO-RESEARCHER #4: "*GAVIN*"

Present Occupation: Businessman

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
32	19	17

October 27, 1996

I drive to an older district of Calgary, wondering in what type of dwelling Gavin resides. I know he is well off. I expect he lives in a new house amongst these older homes. I notice a very old building and drive past it initially, but then I remember the landmarks explained to me over the telephone. I stop my car, open his file, and read my scribbled notes. This is the place.

I enter the decrepit building and I am struck by the renovations occurring. This place is in the process of becoming something more than it has ever been. It is becoming not only Gavin's home, but also home to an artist's workroom, a carpentry shop, and undeveloped areas yet unclaimed. What would possess someone to do this? What does it all mean?

I interviewed Gavin on October 27, 1996.

(adapted from journal entry, October 28, 1996).

Gavin's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

Instead of providing a definition, Gavin handed me an article and explained that it summarized for him the meaning of positive gay identity. The author is Armistead Maupin and the article is called Design for Living. His "blueprint for a more fulfilling life" includes the following advice:
(1) Stop begging for acceptance, (2) Don't run away from straight people, (3) Refuse to cooperate in the lie, (4) Stir up some shit now and then, (5) Don't sell your soul to the gay commercial culture, (6) Stop insulting the people who love you by assuming they don't know you're gay, and (7) Learn to feel mortal.

. . . A quote from the article (p. 93)
You are queer, you lucky fool, and that makes you one of life's buccaneers, free from clutter of two thousand years of Judeo-Christian sermonizing. Stop feeling sorry for yourself and start hoisting your sails. You haven't a moment to lose.

Gavin's Story:

The way I was raised and the family I grew up in provided me a number of advantages. I come from a wealthy family. We always had the biggest house on the block and the best cars. It's very old wealth, and I was brought up much differently than my neighbours. Most of the kids that I grew up with were also fairly wealthy, but they were first generation wealth. There is a different dynamic in the way that works. For example, my friends had brand new skis every year or they went to Hawaii for Christmas. While they spent their money, I was told that we were penniless and that we couldn't afford all these things. If I wanted something like a new pair of skis, I was expected to buy them with my own money.

I realized when I was around eighteen that our family had a sizable amount of wealth. As a result, I was brought up in a position of leadership. I went to boarding school in Victoria for my senior high school years and was trained to be a leader. I was chosen by the school as one of their star students for having future potential. I was sat down in the head masters office with the top masters of the school and given a lecture on what is expected of me. When you come from this type of family, you have responsibilities that you must attend to throughout your life. This is part of your upbringing and your birthright.

I had some attraction for males as far back as kindergarten. I remember sitting in this big room having milk and cookies. I noticed this other kid across the room who I just had to sit next to for no conscious reason. Since grade six I had crushes on certain guys in school. I assumed we were all the same, so when I was sitting in class watching somebody, I assumed that other guys had crushes on guys as well. I figured it was just something that was never discussed. These crushes were never sexual until I went to boarding school. I didn't suffer the name calling through school that many of my present gay friends experienced. I was never teased, probably because I was neither wimpy nor effeminate.

When I was still quite young, my mother informed me that some men choose other men to love instead of women. She didn't say that this is wrong or this is weird or anything like that. It was just a statement.

At boarding school I had a crush on a guy. I wanted to be his friend, I wanted to talk to him, I wanted to always be with him, that sort of thing. I wanted physical closeness. He was in a different residence house and I knew that the only way that I could see him fully naked was to be in that house. Although unheard of, I was permitted to change residence. He graduated while I finished grade eleven.

His brother began grade ten at the same boarding school the subsequent year. I absolutely fell in love with him. I remember sitting on my bed thinking it would be really nice to see him naked, and then I fantasized about watching him masturbate. I even went to the extent of stealing this guy's pillows under the guise that they were fluffy and comfortable, but I wanted them because they contained his scent. The thought occurred to me, *"oh my God, I wonder if I'm gay."* I remember having an image of some pansy dancing around and I thought I am not like that. I managed to suffocate the sexual thoughts until I graduated.

There was a fellow who resided in the same house of boarding school who disclosed to me that he was gay. He took me to a couple of gay bars, which I enjoyed. I remember being in Edmonton for New Years that year and we ended up in a gay bar. I had seen this attractive guy earlier in the evening and when it came time for the New Year's kiss, I made quite an effort to find him. Everyone knew me there as straight so when he saw me he hugged me, but he didn't kiss me. I was quite disappointed. The hug, however, gave me a really wonderful feeling. I got up about five o'clock the next morning and I walked all around Edmonton for about five or six hours thinking about the feeling that I had and how nice this hug was and all that sort of thing and I tried to assess whether or not I might want to go further than that in my mind.

After completing high school in 1982, I returned to my parents' home in Calgary. I started frequenting a bar which was probably 60% gay. I also went to another bar occasionally where the patrons were almost all gay. Walking into a bar in Calgary for the first time was nerve wracking. I didn't grow up in a bar culture and this was also out of my community and my lifestyle. I was fairly attractive and young and I remember thousands of eyes staring at me. It was really intimidating.

I started hanging around with a woman there, and one night her boyfriend invited me to come over to his place. I thought this sounds fine and since he had a girlfriend, I felt very comfortable. We ended up at his place and we started to kiss. Then my shirt came off and his shirt came off and he gave me oral sex. I felt quite uncomfortable. By the third or fourth time that we were together I decided that being gay was more my speed than being straight. It happened very quickly. It was a time too when there were a lot more gay people in the media. I knew that this wasn't a passing phase. Our encounters went on for two or three months.

I had my first sexual encounter with a woman when I was eighteen. I thought it was about time to give this a whirl, but it wasn't really a good experience. I was uncomfortable and I didn't understand how it was supposed to work. I've had one other experience with a woman who knew I was gay, but she had a massive crush on me. She insisted that we have sex and I finally complied. It was fine actually.

I decided to move back to Victoria in the fall of 1983 to prevent embarrassing my teachers, neighbours, and family. I hadn't told anybody yet that I was gay other than my closest friends. I also figured that this move would give me more freedom to be gay. I stayed in Victoria for about six months.

I decided I would return to Calgary and fess up to my family and all my friends. I was completely prepared to be written out of everyone's life and my family's will. The desire to tell them was so strong in me that I decided that if they don't love me because I'm a fag then that was fine.

When I came back to Calgary, I asked my mom and my two sisters to meet me at a neutral place. I told them I was gay and that I wanted everyone to go away and think about this. My mom told one of her closest friends about our meeting and his response was, *"is that it"?* She then read a number of books on the subject. She seemed to be completely fine with it from day one.

My dad lived about a block away from my mom. He knew that I was going to gay bars, so I think he knew, but he was diagnosed with Alzheimers soon after I got back from Victoria. I decided it wasn't worth telling him, and as it turned out he deteriorated very quickly. I really don't think that he would have reacted positively to it.

I met a fellow by the name of Ken and we became very good friends. He saw potential in me and decided that he would take me under his wing. He purchased two adjoining gay bars and made me the manager of both. I had absolutely no experience, but he trusted that I would be able to wing it. I was nineteen at the time. I had such huge responsibilities and yet I was and looked so young. I developed a kind of protectionist snotty air that I still have in a gay bar. I become unapproachable.

I walked home with a friend of mine one night down thirteenth avenue, which at that time was the hustler strip. We were talking outside his apartment when a car load of staff from the bar drove by. The driver slammed on his brakes, they looked at me and said *"oh my God,* *that's Gavin!"* They thought I was trying to pick up a hustler and from that day forward they had much less respect for me.

I learned in my childhood not to have sex until I'm married. The idea of having multiple sexual partners never interested me. I was looking at finding a true love rather than just a sexual experience so I never got into that part of the gay culture. I didn't want a bunch of guys to know me sexually because that would give them the potential to gossip. After my experience of being on thirteenth avenue, I was never going to allow it to happen again.

I managed the bars for about three months before Ken lost the business. He subsequently went into another business and convinced me to do the same. We ended up being very successful in our business partnership.

I strongly believe that the reason I am successful today is because of my sexuality. Excelling became a security blanket in that I believed it would help in my acceptance of being gay. I felt that if I was on top of the ladder financially and socially, people could not come back at me and say *"well, you're no good because you're a faggot."* Consequently, I think my sexuality really pushed me to excel. When I look back, I realize the reason that I worked so hard in my late twenties, made so much money, wore certain clothes, and purchased the cars I drove was based on my discomfort with my sexuality. I realized I was proud of being gay on the surface, but I had created a shelter to make sure that nothing would come crashing down around me because of my sexuality. Once I realized what steps I had made to hide or legitimise my sexuality, I became aware how deeply it had affected me. That's when I started to become a positive gay man. Now anything could come crashing down and if somebody said it is because I am a fag, it would not phase me at all. It would never be the excuse.

Even up until two years ago I would have been really nervous to hold hands with somebody in the car at a stop light or something. Then I saw the movie Priest, and it had a phenomenal effect on me. It made me really, really mad when I realized how much being gay had affected me over my life. I realized that I had been oppressed since childhood. That made me look around and try and figure out what other aspects of my life had been affected.

After the movie, I sat with a friend at a local bar. We talked with the bartender who was an openly gay man and with a hairdresser who had been out since he was seventeen. He was absolutely flamboyant and everyone knew he was gay. We started talking about the gay pride march that was happening in Calgary and it was divulged that neither of them had come out to their families. Furthermore, they said that they would never be caught dead at a gay rally or march.

I was just furious because I realized that as much as they think they are out and living gay lifestyles, they are actually in complete denial. The reason that I reacted so harshly was that I was hearing them and seeing part of myself in what they were saying. That really hit home and actually the very next morning I went out to buy a pride flag sticker for my car because I thought this is a way to send a signal to other people. I felt that it was really important to get the message out that we are everywhere. Especially in 1996 in Canada, you've still got to make a strong conscientious effort to continue to grow and continue to be partly different. You need to realize all the different effects that the straight community and the world have on you.

When I went to the gay games in Vancouver, the feeling of seeing twenty or thirty thousand gay men and lesbians in one room was indescribable. You come out a completely recharged person. There's sixteen-year-olds, eighty-year-olds, people in wheelchairs, and every single thing is going on in that room and it's really, really powerful. Friends have recommended that I go and stay for a month or so in a huge gay culture: not the west end in Vancouver or even San Francisco, but somewhere where it's just completely open. Sydney, Australia is apparently the place. I've been told that until you get into a situation where everything is completely open, where it doesn't matter and everyone is so accepting, you can't see the oppression that you're experiencing.

I haven't had an all encompassing experience of being in love yet. I made the decision a long time ago that if I'm single forever, that's okay. I'm not going to make an exception. If it's not going to be perfect or near-perfect then I'm not interested. I have no intention of camping out with somebody for six months and pretending it's all glorious. I have a very specific sort of taste. If somebody is not 100% physically attractive then I'm not really that interested. They also have to have a hundred percent of the personal qualities I look for as well.

I still have a really hard time relating to the average person. I can be dancing with a guy in a gay bar and someone will come up to me and say, *"why do you straight people come here?"* For some reason I guess I don't look gay. I'm not very good at communicating with people in a bar. I still don't understand the politics of it and I don't think it's a place that I would meet somebody anyway.

Talking about positive gay identity, two years ago one of my goals was to accept the subgroups of the gay community. For example, bears, drag queens, and leather types. I wondered why we had to be associated with these groups. I realize now that the entire community needs to be embraced, and again that was a pride issue.

In terms of my growth as a gay person, I still want to experience more in the gay world, more in a psychological or mental way than a sexual way. My goal is to continue to discover within myself and within the gay community whatever can make my life happier or other people's lives happier or easier. I've always felt that I have been extraordinarily lucky in the way that I grew up. I had a much easier time dealing with things like sexuality or solving life issues as compared to many gay men and lesbians.

My positive gay identity is integrally related to my background, my upbringing, the size of the community here, and the negative reaction to homosexuality on the large scale here. The homophobia creates amazing dysfunction in the community and I personally feel that part of my having a positive gay identity must be the continuing education of others, whether they are gay, lesbian, or straight.

Being gay is about freedom from everything . . . absolute freedom. A lot of the early Canadian explorers were gay and they were allowed to be explorers because they had the freedom to do it. They didn't care. They didn't have families, they didn't have kids, they had the ability to do absolutely whatever they wanted. There wasn't the urge to settle down and there wasn't the urge to get into a standard relationship.

CO-RESEARCHER #5: *"JONATHAN"*

Present Occupation: Systems Analyst

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
30	12	8-to-9

Recollections, July 9, 1997

Being gay means being part of a minority group. What does a person experience who manages more than one minority status?

Jonathan is an Asian gay man whom I met last academic year. I knew he once owned a business with a large gay clientele, and as I got to know him better, I perceived that he had a very positive view of himself as a gay man. I interviewed Jonathan on October 30, 1996.

Jonathan's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *Being able to carry out a gay lifestyle on a daily basis with dignity and proudness.*

Jonathan's Story:

I was born in Hong Kong and my family moved to Canada when I was five. My father was concerned that my brother and I would lose our language and our culture so he sent us back to Hong Kong six times or so to attend school. Sometimes my mother would miss us so much that we would return after a few months.

I knew from a young age that I was different. I knew that I did not fit the norm in society, I knew that I would be ridiculed, and I knew that I wouldn't be able to give my parents children. At an early stage I said that this is going to be really tough, so I started looking at myself and saying what can I do to keep myself happy instead of being depressed about not being like everybody else. During my final trip to Hong Kong at age twelve or thirteen, I told a close cousin that I'm very different and that I feel different. She was very supportive. I started realizing that to feel good about myself, I needed to become honest with as many people as possible.

My parents always owned and operated restaurants, and I poured my first cup of coffee when I was nine. Customers thought I was the cutest thing. It was difficult for me when I met certain guys that turned me on. From an early age I remember just gawking at men. I didn't find kids attractive because I knew they were kids. I found late teenagers and men attractive. Perhaps that is where my attraction for older men came from.

I began experimenting with some friends when I was eleven or twelve. I recollect two experiences where we rubbed each other to orgasm. Both times were quite enjoyable. No other sexual experiences occurred for the next five years.

Between ages twelve and fourteen, I thirsted for knowledge about being gay. I read about the gay life in San Francisco and I learned that they were concentrated mainly in big cities. I read a lot about gay people: their behavior and their lifestyle. Because I read mostly magazines, my concept of gay life when I was younger was the club scene where guys danced half-naked. I found this image quite exciting and glamorous.

I told a few female friends in grade ten that I was gay. All the people I chose to tell became very supportive and thought it was cool. I never came out to a male friend with the exception of my best friend, who is himself gay. He started giving me pamphlets about the gay and lesbian community centre here and then he eventually took me out to the bar. I was very involved with sports and there were social clubs and the students' union so I was very high profile. I really didn't get hassled much. I never told the people that I knew would give me problems.

In high school, as in any grade, you get the same ridicule regardless of whether you are gay or not. You get picked on simply for being different in your appearance or your behavior. I was never afraid that others would find out I was gay. I was concerned for my friends, however, in that they might get ridiculed for hanging around a gay person.

Emotionally I was never attracted to women. I liked the emotional support they provided but it wasn't an emotional bond that I wanted from them. There was no sexual bond at all. I certainly have not had a lack of beautiful women in my life. I had beautiful women with me all the time. Beautiful women still turn my head, but I don't notice them in a sexual way. I appreciate them aesthetically.

My family moved around almost once a year, usually to a small town. It's really hard to find gay identity when you're living in a small town because you can't blend in and there are few people you can discuss it with or tell. Shortly after we moved to Edmonton where I would begin grade nine, Dad announced that we would be moving again. I put my foot down with my father and I told him I would stay in Edmonton. I finally took a stance and said this is what I want. My brother and I stayed in a one bedroom apartment and I took care of him. My parents returned to Edmonton after a year or so and we again lived together.

That's when the confrontation started. I started going out to the bars in grade ten and eleven. A couple of times I stayed out later than my curfew. The last time I broke it was pretty severe because they locked me out. I had to sleep in the hallway of the apartment until they later let me in.

I was quite a good child and always honest with my parents. I usually got what I wanted because I was rational and responsible. Consequently, my parents often let me stay out later than my curfew.

I started going to gay bars at age sixteen. The sea of men was incredible, but at such a young age, it was really hard to get picked up. I have no idea why. That was one of the bad times in my gay life when I was coming out. It wasn't that I didn't feel good about myself but it was the projection that I didn't feel good about myself because other people wouldn't notice me. I felt a lot of depression and it made me question my happiness about being gay.

I think we all face a bit of doubt when we are unhappy at a certain stage. I thought maybe if I tried being straight I could find some happiness. It wasn't that I actually questioned being gay, but I wondered if the gay thing would go away and if I would find happiness if I got married. Happiness was my one and only driving force: it wasn't directly about being gay.

It was pretty rough for about eighteen months. I had to deal with the fact that I was a minority as far as being gay because there were no other Chinese gay people that I met. That was really hard because when you go to the bar and you're young, you want to be picked up, you want to be liked and when it doesn't happen, you look for answers. One of the answers I surmised was that maybe these guys aren't into Orientals. I knew I was not the only gay person, but I soon realized there were few gay Oriental persons. I felt like I was right back at square one. That was very difficult.

I had a very negative sexual experience when I was sixteen. I thought I wanted to go all the way with this older man and I said *"no"* in the middle of it, but there was no going back. I ended up being forced into anal sex. My friend took me down to the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre and we talked to a counsellor. I was very embarrassed. I didn't want anybody to know.

One night I was fortunate enough to pick up a guy, but there was a condition attached to it. He wanted my best friend, Don, to join us. I'm thinking *"woe, this is my first experience and it's going to be a little harsh . . . a threesome with my best friend."* The experience became one-sided because this guy really just wanted my best friend.

Afterwards Don went home and I stayed the night. I wanted that affection so much, that man-to-man affection, that warm, pseudo love. I knew the consequences, you know, I knew I had a curfew, I knew everything. I wasn't drunk, I wasn't on drugs or anything.

I took the bus home that morning feeling really depressed because the experience had been so empty. Everything I had wished for the night before was not the next day. The sex hadn't been gratifying and there was an absence of affection.

As I was arriving home my parents were preparing to leave. I told them in Chinese that I'm gay. It was really weird because I hadn't rehearsed it and I never even dreamed of telling them. All of a sudden the whole world just turned black and caved in. They began yelling at the top of their lungs and I began yelling as well. I yelled at my father that I'm this way because of you. The slap across my face ended the conversation.

The next week was just hell. My mom stayed in her bedroom bawling her head off. I would come home and go to my room. That's it. There was dead silence between us. I had had enough by the following weekend, and I decided to go to the bar again. My parents asked, *"where are you going?"* I replied, *"I'm just going out to the bar."* That was all that was said. As I was nearly finished getting ready, my father came out and said, *"if you love us you will stay home from now on and not go to these places. If you walk out this door tonight, don't ever come back."* That was an easy decision for some kid who's seventeen and rebellious. So I said, *"okay, thank you,"* and I closed the door and left. I didn't come home that night. The next day I asked Don to pick me up and I moved out. I lived on my own for four years.

I understand how shocking the news was to my parents. That's society's fault for separating the homosexual from the heterosexual. If you look at the heterosexual society and the homosexual society they are very similar. We go shopping, we go to movies, we get married, we get divorced, we go to hospitals, we do everything.

A year after I moved out my parents proceeded to get a divorce. She discovered he was having the third or fourth affair within five or six years and she had had enough. I felt total hatred toward my father for what he did to my mother. To this day I'm still very angry. When I see him my temper flares immediately. I haven't seen him for over a year. Perhaps I still resent him for throwing me out when I was younger. My father has tried many times to reconcile by asking me out for dinner, but I always refuse. Most of my anger, however, is because he left my mom a divorcee. She's alone in her house. He's caused her so much pain over the years. I've always wanted stability in my life and my father never gave us that. We always moved. He's always been a heavy gambler.

Through the divorce my mom and I became closer. Mom really liked Joe, my first lover, but she thought he was too old for me. He was twenty years my senior. We settled down together as a gay couple, and I became aware that we could have a normal life. Prior to this I had no idea you could live a normal life as a gay person. As a matter of fact I had no clue what type of life I would be leading once I became a gay adult.

From age eighteen to twenty-one, I had a wonderful time. My first job paid twelve dollars an hour and I cleared over a thousand dollars a month. I was very happy. I had a good relationship, I had a good income, we lived in a very nice apartment. Joe took good care of me. He let me grow the way I needed to grow. He didn't shape me or mold me, he didn't say, *"you're too feminine, don't wear that"* or *"it's too flamboyant."* In turn I contributed to helping him see how being gay can be a positive experience. I had nothing but praise for him. I gave him nothing but support and over the years he said, *"you are probably the most inspirational person to me."* To this day, I still see him and we talk like we were just old friends.

The biggest stereotype I had to overcome was that all gay people were feminine. It wasn't difficult, however. I would pick up a gay magazine and notice gay cowboys and other butch-looking men with great chests who would go to the bar without wearing shirts and I couldn't wait to explore for myself!

The early 80's were my favorite times because all the men were masculine and the music was great. Brad, who became my best friend, took me under his wing when I started going to the second gay bar I frequented in Edmonton. I felt some sexual attraction for him initially, but that soon dissipated as we became close friends. He had a beautiful big chest from working out regularly, he was tall, he was a professional, and he was funny. I especially liked his connection with his male friends in the bar. Everybody knew him and he knew everybody. He was inspirational and he became my role model.

I would say I had developed a positive gay identity by age nineteen. In adopting a positive gay identity, the biggest journey for me was to try and find happiness with who I am. I realized I could be a professional and I knew that I could have a gay lifestyle and be public. Before I thought you had to hide, but I was wrong. Some of my best gay friends were these big butch guys that had really good jobs. I discovered that all gays weren't hairdressers or feminine types. I met bank managers, construction workers, and police officers, for example. I was amazed at the number of gays who were in very professional jobs. The excellent relationships I have had were the ones where I attained a positive gay lifestyle. Those were with men who were not afraid to be gay.

When Joe and I broke up, I moved into a building right next to my mom so that I could be closer to her. In 1986, I bought her a house and we both moved in that summer. It was fantastic.

Religion never played a big part of my life. We were Catholic for a small period of time and that was only because I liked to go to Sunday school. Spirituality to me is about finding inner peace.

Today I still wonder whether I would have come out if I had stayed in Hong Kong. I learned Western ways about kids getting to do what they wanted. If I hadn't learned these types of personal freedoms, I don't think that I would have turned out the same way. It was very difficult growing up in an Oriental family realizing that because you are gay you will not fulfill a lot of the obligations of an Oriental grandson. It took me a very long time to value my gay identity and my Chinese identity equally. Before that I valued my gay identity more because it was more important to be true to myself. I needed to be true to myself and I needed to be happy and at that time I attributed being happy to being gay. I thought I could choose either the Chinese lifestyle, maintain my Chinese traditional values, and leave the gay lifestyle behind the scenes or I could do the reverse. I used to think of these identities as separate before I was able to merge them together and begin valuing Chinese gayness. This took a lot of thinking.

I tried to please my family with their values and I was trying to lead a positive gay life believing that I had to do this for myself. It finally dawned on me that I could have the best of both. I have successfully done that. I am showing my mother that I've got an education, I'm financially successful, I'm still the loving son, I support and take care of her, and I'm gay. My mom and I have a wonderful relationship, and she loves my present lover to death.

I feel that I am a complete gay man and I no longer have any internal conflicts about it. I have some personal issues that have to do with not wanting to be alone. Sometimes I get concerned about growing old alone.

In my present job I have not come out to the people who could affect my chances of promotion. I don't think I would be afraid if they did find out. I don't think it would affect my chances of career advancement.

What I would like to do now is give back to the community what I got out of it. I have tried to help some younger gays turn their lives around and develop a positive gay attitude and a good lifestyle. I've been successful in two-or-three cases.

There are studies that say that the average gay person doesn't earn more than minimum wage. I think your financial status certainly plays a role in how you develop a positive identity, regardless of whether you are gay or not. There is a gay connotation that says you have to wear the best clothes and look good all the time. Money certainly plays a role in this.

Some people have a really hard time enjoying gay sex. That has something to do with identity. I can't remember if I read it or if I talked to somebody about it but there's a lot of people that I think have an illusion about gay sex. Having a positive gay identity doesn't mean that you necessarily have good gay sex. I remember after getting raped, I didn't feel like that's all gay sex was. However, I think a lot of people who are trying to decide if they are gay or not could be deeply affected by that type of negative experience. If you have a negative gay experience when you were still deciding that could deter you from having a positive gay identity as you progress through your life. I'm not saying that having a good sex experience at the very beginning will necessarily lead to a positive gay identity either as it all depends on the other factors that come along with it.

If you really haven't admitted that you're gay and you go and have gay sex, guilt can drive you toward not having a positive mental attitude about it. Guilt played a big part in my life too. I think that would play a big part in other people's lives because of society's disapproval.

It was really hard to not feel guilty about wanting to love a man. I probably finally dealt with it when I was about eighteen. Brad and his friends helped me get over my guilt. I decided that I didn't have to feel guilty about going to the bar or to hold another man in my arms or to worry about other people. As a matter of fact, I had one little incident when I was in San Francisco five years ago while holding hands with another man in their gay ghetto. I had a hard time because I worried about what other people would think. I challenged myself with this fear, however, and it went away really quickly.

Another thing I knew that had affected me was the lack of knowledge about other people in society who are gay. I wouldn't refer to this as a lack of gay role models, but simply that many gays are so invisible that you don't realize they exist everywhere. Nonetheless, I think role models are very important to establishing a gay identity.

Even gay people make discriminations of other gay people. I remember as soon as I realized that there was a butch crowd to hang around with I became part of that group. I remember saying things like, *"you know that guy is so nellie"* or *"once you're a drag queen you're always a drag queen"*: that type of discrimination. It's only been in the last three years that I've gotten out of that habit, that shell. I think we need to develop our own role models by appreciating that we are all one community and we can't afford to discriminate against ourselves because it certainly has an effect on other people. If those who have these traits are being ridiculed by other gay people, it will be difficult for them to develop a positive gay identity.

Furthermore, by observing those who discriminate, they may learn to ridicule other people which causes yet further discrimination. If we are ridiculing ourselves, our own people in our community, what that says to society is that it is okay to ridicule us. That defeats our entire cause of trying to gain acceptance in society.

Gay means a lot of things. By saying I accept being gay means I accept all the things that gay people are. If when you accept the fact that you're gay, you then turn around and compare yourself to others, that's wrong because being gay is not just about yourself. It's about everybody.

CO-RESEARCHER #6: *"JEROME"*

Present Occupation: Politician

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
(middle-aged)	21	8-or-9

Recollections, July 16, 1997

To date, Alberta is one of the few provinces that still refuses to provide protection under the provincial human rights legislation to gay and lesbian individuals. When I first moved to Edmonton to begin my studies at the University of Alberta, I became aware of a politician who was openly gay. This surprised me, especially when I discovered that he had been reelected. I subsequently met Jerome at a number of gay events in Edmonton, and as we got to know one another, I asked him if he would become a co-researcher. I interviewed Jerome on November 2, 1996.

Jerome's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *Living in the world as a male whose sexuality is gay and using my gay identity as an opportunity and an asset.*

Jerome's Story:

I grew up in a rather large family: three brothers and three sisters. We lived in a city of about 50,000 people. In those days, I don't think I knew what gay was. The term was hardly ever used and there certainly wasn't anything about gays and about being homosexual on television. If there were any books on the subject, they were locked away in the library somewhere and nobody talked about it. I don't think I was aware of what was going on in my own sexuality until I was sixteen or seventeen. It didn't seem to click the same way as with other folks. As my siblings became involved with members of the opposite sex, I kept waiting for it to happen to me. It never did.

I remember an incident at a movie theatre when I was sixteen or seventeen. While in the washroom stall, somebody next to me put his hand under my stall a couple of times. I had no idea what it meant, but it simultaneously terrified me and excited me. I think that particular incident made me realize that I found other men exciting, but I thought little about it at the time. As I thought about it over the next few weeks, however, I realized there was something fascinating about it. I thought he was probably interested in putting his hand on my penis or something comparable.

Around the same age, I went swimming quite a bit in the summer. I remember being at the beach and spending more time looking at men than women. I found significant amounts of body hair exciting, a turn on, without knowing why or without being able to explain it. I needed some information and books to help me understand my feelings. I felt like I was in some kind of a wasteland. As I usually do in situations like that, I simply ignored my feelings. I had a couple of women as girlfriends back then, but it was very casual and nonsexual. We went to movies occasionally.

I don't think my family was aware that I was different from my brothers and sisters. I wasn't as athletic as two of my brothers, probably because I was always short. As time went on I did a little running. Other than that, I soon dropped away from sports and became more involved in organizations and clubs. I was always encouraged to study, and I did fairly well academically.

Regarding my gayness, I remained totally unaware in high school. The whole construct of being gay was still pretty nebulous in those days. A gay friend of mine who I knew from back then believes I was just oblivious, however. I think there is some truth to that.

I went from high school to college right away and it wasn't until then that things started changing for me. Some of my closer friends in college became involved with women, and I realized that I wasn't the least bit interested in anything sexual with women. That's when I started to pull back a little and look for something to read on the topic of homosexuality. The term "gay" was hardly used back then from what I recall. I was still not consciously acknowledging that I was gay, but I wondered what it all meant.

After two years of college I went to West Africa to teach in a training college for two-and-a-half years. Those two years were among the most important in my life. I grew up a whole lot and in most ways fairly positively. It really made me think about myself and the world that I lived in. People in this culture saw the world in different ways and did things in different ways. I started to refocus and think about who I was and what my values were.

My sense of religion evaporated very quickly with that experience. My siblings and I all went to a Catholic grade school and church. I certainly had that ideology with all of its prescriptions about sex. I was surprised at how fast I just threw that all out. Distancing myself from my close-knit family helped.

I was sent to a place with two other fellows. After two weeks, one of them gave up on the whole thing and did absolutely the minimal amount of instruction. The second one eventually moved in that direction. I had a wonderful time, however. I was busy from the time I got there and learned a huge amount. I grew like mad. It was a great experience.

In the areas where I lived in West Africa, there were not the same moral kinds of prescriptions against sex, and it wasn't seen from a religious perspective. There was a great deal of spirituality, however, but sexuality had nothing to do with it. Sex play amongst younger kids was much more open and much more common. Even sexual intercourse was much more open. Families lived in small spaces and sexual activities between the mother and father took place with children present, maybe asleep or half asleep. It was not a big deal or this mysterious kind of thing hidden away in the dark of night.

In two of the areas I lived, the father was not significant in child rearing. The mother's older brother was the one involved in raising the children with the mother's aid. The father was there primarily for sexual purposes. He had children that he supported from his sister. This sacred idea of the nuclear family raising their kids was thrown out the window for me. There was not a great deal of homosexuality that I was aware of or found but there wasn't much prohibition about it either. Although there were prohibitions around some kinds of sexual activities (e.g., incest), in general there were fewer and they were different from what I was used to.

My sojourn to Africa provided me an opportunity to think about how we put our lives together and what things mean and why we give values to certain things. I wondered if some of the things I value in this society make any sense.

I ignored my sexuality while I was there. I was still looking at men but I was not doing much about it. Men in this society were much more affectionate with other men. Men commonly held hands when they walked together and they often hugged one another. In the places I lived, men formed stronger bonds with men than with women.

I'll never forget one of the first days that I was there. A fellow talking to me just grabbed my hand as we walked. I nearly froze and fell over. I was just terrified. Then I realized that this was a common activity and I soon became very comfortable with it. It probably meant more to me than the locals, however, as I started to fantasize about doing more than just holding hands and hugging, although it never went any further.

My gay awareness really began to explode when I left West Africa and returned to school. In total, I changed majors about eight times and attended six different universities. I completed a bachelor's degree in history and eventually returned and took a masters degree in early childhood education. Later I returned again and completed a second masters in special education with a major in early childhood.

The first few months back were very difficult for me, probably one of the most difficult periods in my life. I had become so accustomed to another culture and society with differing values and beliefs. I was judging American society by the society I had been in. A lot of things seemed awfully superficial.

When I returned, I became roommates with Joe, the gay friend I told you about earlier. While I was gone, he came to accept his gayness and was involved with some sexual activity with men, but he was still in the closet and hid this from me. As was typical at the time, we didn't talk about such things. I started to figure out what was happening, however, as I ran into a couple of men that he had been with sexually.

I then went off to another school and ended up in a city where I didn't know anyone. I shared an apartment with a fellow who had a couple of gay friends who were fairly obvious about it. These were the first people I knew who were visibly gay. I began meeting gay people who did not fit the stereotypes and this really jarred me. One night I walked home from the library and a guy pulled up in his car. He asked me for directions to get somewhere, but it was soon obvious that there was something else on his mind. He talked his way into coming back to my place and we had sex together.

It was a horrible experience when I think back about it. He was creepy and I felt like I did something bad and dirty. I didn't have a strong sense of guilt, however, as my parents did not bring us up that way. I wondered, though, if this is what gay life is like. It bothered me a lot.

Shortly after that I stopped at a friends one evening. While walking back to my place, a fellow walked by and did the double look sort of thing. He ended up back at my place. This turned out to be a totally different experience. It was wonderful. He soon figured out that I was pretty inexperienced and didn't know much about being gay. He would have been a few years older than me and was much more knowledgable. On a sexual level this experience really changed things for me. I became sexually active from that time on with men and actively pursued it. I still didn't admit that I was homosexual or gay. Instead I ignored it.

Although I consciously denied or pretended that I wasn't gay, I started seeking more information. By this time there was a freeing up in the general media. Movies and television were presenting gay characters periodically, but most of it was pretty negative.

I started spending time in areas where men cruise, not in bars but in outdoor areas where there were cars. I began cruising myself. At the time I was terrified of people finding out. I enjoyed the sex, however, and had no difficulty thinking that it was bad or anything.

I met a fellow that I got to know and I became infatuated with him. He was much more accepting of his sexuality and much more aware of being gay than I was, and I was frightened by some of that. One of the few regrets I have is that I wasn't ready for any kind of relationship at that time and I really closed it off. I accepted a job in another city and I didn't tell him. I just moved. I was still ignoring what my feelings were telling me. I wanted to be seen as straight, and part of my motivation was because I was teaching young kids. I was concerned that I might be outed. For some years this fear pushed me into leading two different lives: one at work in my professional life and the other that was involved sexually with men. I kept the two lives entirely apart and hoped they would never cross. My friends were still almost exclusively heterosexual.

When I moved I found out fairly quickly where the gay bars were and although I didn't actually go to the bars, I went in the vicinity of the bars to meet other men for primarily sexual purposes. I enjoyed the sex and the intimacy that came with it at the time, but I was not desiring intimacy from a gay relationship. I was afraid of it. I had a lot of social interaction which provided for my intimacy needs. I always overworked. Part of that was a reaction to my sexuality in thinking that I had to do more or better work than straight men.

Some time later I attended graduate school, and there was a large active gay and lesbian community there. I did not become involved in it, but I knew about it. I became roommates again with Joe who was actively involved in a gay relationship. He had a number of gay friends that he spent time with and his social circle was clearly becoming gay individuals.

The first time I went to a gay bar I went alone. I cased out the place a number of times before I was able to enter. It was exciting and terrifying. It was probably a step into beginning to consciously acknowledge that I was gay as opposed to ignoring it. I went to a couple of other gay bars afterwards where it was a little easier to chat with folks as opposed to this place which was a noisy dance bar.

I soon met a fellow with whom I had a brief intense fling, and I finally acknowledged that I was gay and I began talking about it to him. I was still doing a lot of reading and trying to keep up with what was happening in the gay world.

Later I established my first relationship which lasted for a couple years. I was still in the closet at work and with straight people and it became more complicated trying to hide my lover. My two lives were beginning to grate on me.

I was still concerned about how my immediate family would react. I knew from others that it could be a very negative experience, and my family was fairly religious. I was also afraid what people at work would think. I was still working with young kids and I was concerned that they would assume I was a paedophile. I felt very vulnerable. I was resenting having to keep my worlds separate, however.

I think a lot of changes were happening for me as my identity consolidated. I moved to Calgary in 1979 to begin a job teaching students in an early childhood program. I became immersed with work and I was just busy like mad. One of the things that I thought about when I moved to Calgary was that I wanted to get involved in the gay community. It didn't happen, however, as I wasn't in Calgary long enough and my job took too much time and energy.

After a couple years I moved to Edmonton to work for the provincial government as an Early Childhood Development Consultant. One of my goals was to become involved with the gay and lesbian community in Edmonton. The first people I started to get to know outside of work were gay individuals.

I went to a western gay and lesbian conference on a weekend and this became the first gay activity that I ever attended. I met a lot of folks and found out more about the other organizations in Edmonton. The conference was quite exciting and I enjoyed participating in a gay event. They had a little march which I wasn't brave enough to join, but watching it was important to me as I felt a little closer to being public.

The seminal event for me was the bathhouse raid because I was there that night. I had lived in Edmonton less than a year when it happened. The police came charging in and I was arrested along with everybody else. Truthfully, I was watching television at the time. I knew about earlier raids that had occurred in Toronto and Montreal, but I remember feeling both helpless and very angry at myself for not really knowing the law, my rights, and the implications of this arrest. We were all charged with being found at a body house under the criminal code. I said to myself that I would never let that happen again.

Even if I had been involved sexually with men there, the fact that we were all treated like criminals seemed insane to me. I began moving in some different directions real fast after that night ended. When I eventually got home there were big headlines in the newspaper. I telephoned a gay organization and was told to come down because they were having a meeting. There were media all over the place. A bigger meeting was held at the local gay bar later, and the media wanted to talk to folks who were present the night of the raid.

I had dealt with the media in my professional life and I decided to talk with them. The first thing the media asked me was what name I wanted to use and the only one I could think of was my own! Television and radio used my live voice and a number of folks told me afterward that I have a fairly distinctive voice and they had figured out who I was.

Monday I went to work a little worried, but I also didn't think anyone would know. I was certainly a bit concerned as I was dealing with kindergarten programs in the region. The people I worked with in smaller communities became aware that I was gay because the bathhouse raid was the biggest story around for a couple weeks. It was in the newspapers and broadcast over radio throughout all of northern Alberta.

A couple people I knew through work were very supportive. Others told me they were really proud of the way I handled it. Some said the fact that I'm gay is fine with them and that they expected to continue working with me as they always have. There were some others who found it very difficult and offensive, but that's life. I never look back in that regard. By comparison, I can't believe I lived my earlier years in the closet.

The print media was after me again wanting to write more articles and I decided either I was going to do it and use my name or I wasn't going to do it. It was one or the other and I decided I'd do it and use my name and I've never changed since then. It turned out that I was the only one who would talk. That for me was really dealing with my sexuality publicly. I was no longer worried if some people wouldn't like me because of being gay. I had enough friends who did accept me as I am[17].

I became actively involved in a number of gay and lesbian organizations in town and I started a number of them over the years. Becoming more involved in the gay community helped immensely as the people I met gave me strength and the social connection that I needed. I started meeting a lot more gay men who were very decent individuals and who lived their lives very reasonably. I began to see myself as a person who deserved respect as a gay man and who could function as a gay man.

Eventually everybody in the city knew I was gay but my family still didn't know. It's usually the other way around. I began by telling my siblings, and they all had different opinions about whether I should tell my parents or not. In the end I decided I was going to tell them. I told my father first, and he didn't seem all that surprised. It wasn't a big deal to him, and in fact our relationship continued to get better as he and I got older.

My mother's first reaction was, "*oh, I don't think you should tell your father*," and I said "*I already did*." She replied, "*what? He never told me?*" "Both my parents were quite well educated. My mother was a psychiatric nurse and I think she had a lot of understanding about being gay. They both read a great deal and stayed current with things. My mother is actually quite proud of me. My father died a few years after he knew and has been dead now for 11 years.

As a result of being open and public, I have been subjected to a fair amount of discrimination and harassment. I believe I didn't get some of the higher promotions and some of the tasks that I would have if I wasn't gay, but this is impossible to prove. I've done a lot of radio shows and call ins and people call and say all kinds of awful things, like "*you should be shot*" and "*your kind is awful*" and "*we'll get you*" and all that kind of stuff. I've had calls at home and I've had letters sent to me with similar messages. I had my electricity turned off once because somebody found out where I lived. I've learned to live with it in terms of knowing what it is, knowing that it shouldn't happen, and knowing that society needs to change.

I remember at one time saying to call ins that they have every right to their opinions. That changed after somebody said something really nasty to me. I replied that I don't believe that nonsense and you don't have the right to say that to me. The next time somebody called with obscenities and hateful words I yelled right back at them on the radio. Now I don't take that. I have as much dignity as anyone else.

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[17] I realize that this sounds easier than it was. It did take some time to work through this and rebuild my confidence, although I never again denied I was gay.

When you read hate mail, it's a different experience then when the crap is blasted in your ear. Reading *"you fucking faggot, you should be shot"* or *"what have you had for breakfast?"* is revolting. The frequency of these sorts of threats and hateful comments goes up and down. Since I've been elected, if we are dealing with something that relates to being gay or lesbian and I'm part of that or quoted I sometimes get some calls or letters and then it drops off again.

I have also been gay bashed a couple of times in the past. I was grabbed and slugged around fifteen-years ago by some fellows that had been drinking and were looking for a faggot to beat. In the second incident, I was again grabbed and slugged and my watch stolen. I was in an area where the assailant was looking for someone gay to grab and do that with. No incidents have occurred since I moved to Edmonton in 1981.

My growth as a gay person is a lifelong journey. I think for my generation it's a never-ending process. I am continually dealing with overcoming my own internalized homophobia. For example, my compulsive working certainly stemmed from compensating for being gay.

Even though I am openly gay and publicly gay, there are still times when I don't acknowledge when I should in public settings. I think I also have some fear of growing old and alone. I don't really believe it but there is a little of that there.

In terms of my own gay identity, publicly acknowledging that I'm gay was certainly a major breakthrough for putting the pieces together. Leading the different lives had become harder and trickier to do successfully and I resented having to do it. I needed to integrate my identity and I was ready for it. Sometimes you need a kick in the butt. That might not have been the best way to get a kick, but it worked.

By accident, I became heavily involved in dealing with AIDS from a social political perspective. I became one of the co-founders of the AIDS organization in Edmonton and I was their spokesperson for the first couple of years. The major newspaper named me citizen of the year for my work with AIDS.

Those kinds of things have reassured me that I can integrate all of my life as a gay man and make it work in a way that is productive for me personally and hopefully reasonable for the society I live in as well. I am inspired to make some changes in this world, and I am directly involved in helping to do this as a politician.

CO-RESEARCHER #7: *"FRÉDERIC"*

Present Occupation: Elementary Teacher and Artist

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
37	24	10

July 21, 1997

I wondered whether the experience of developing or maintaining a positive gay identity would be especially challenged for gay men who had acquired HIV. A fellow psychologist was instrumental in helping me to contact both Fréderic and co-researcher #10.

November 1, 1996

I drop off the questionnaires at Fréderic's today. My interview with him is on Sunday, and there is no time to mail the documents. I walk through his door, and he greets me with a smile and hug that instills in me the feeling of being with an old friend. I've never met him before. He shows me his art which beams color and life.

(adapted from journal entry, November 1, 1996).

November 3, 1996

Departing Fréderic's home leaves me exhausted and sad. His colorful, lively art is a good metaphor of his personality. Driving away, I'm grieving over someone else who passed away a few months ago from AIDS. I don't want to think that this co-researcher will likely succumb eventually to this illness too . . . but I can't deny it either. I too must feel. I cannot run any longer. There is no place left to hide that can soothe me from this truth of AIDS.

(adapted from journal entry, November 3, 1996).

Fréderic's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *To be able to integrate one's gayness in his or her daily life. To be proud and rooted spiritually and emotionally as a gay person.*

Fréderic's Story:

I spent my first seventeen years in a small rural town in Quebec in the Gaspe Peninsula. I have six older brothers, and two of them are also gay.

I was aware of some homoerotic interest from age ten through fourteen. My closest friends were good-looking boys. I wouldn't say I had major sexual fantasies for them, but I clearly felt some erotic interest toward them. I was also attracted to certain actors in movies and on television. When I went swimming, I remember watching men in their trunks and in the showers. That was definitely the place to be. I knew that my clothed friends looked better without clothes. I also admit that at a young age some of the people that I fantasized about were much older then me. That is still there. My dad used to sell magazines in his store, and I would buy gay magazines and use the pictures for fantasizing and masturbating.

I did not interpret my emerging homoerotic feelings as negative. My parents did not have a positive attitude about gay people, however. According to my mother, they didn't know homosexuality existed. Their attitude slowed my coming out. Although I have two gay brothers, they had both moved away home by the time my homoerotic feelings were growing stronger. I was the last teen to be with my parents.

I think sexual orientation becomes more alive during the teenage years, and family is a powerful influence on its expression. In my late teen years I found out that two of my brothers were gay. I think this provided role models, albeit negative ones as I will explain later.

If you don't experience gayness with somebody outside the family situation, you don't really define it clearly for yourself. I need to define my own gayness because I am somebody who believes strongly in my own independence and defining what I want. Although I had gay brothers around me, I made the decision that I would find out things for myself.

My friends started dating girls from age thirteen up, and I knew I was not similarly interested. I had sexual encounters with two females when I was fifteen or sixteen. It wasn't great, but it was good. I knew that it wasn't exactly what I wanted because I found out that besides the bedroom, I wanted to experience an emotional connection to a male. I didn't want to learn about the straight world. I wasn't attracted to that. At age seventeen roughly, I became aware that I was attracted to men.

My eldest gay brother and I shared the same bed when he came home for summers or holidays. From ages thirteen to fifteen, he had sex with me occasionally. This involved touch, masturbation, and oral sex. This was sexual abuse. He manipulated by telling me that this was sex education. I became his pupil. He wasn't my type at all. One of my straight brothers almost got it too. The abuse eventually stopped because I wasn't as nice as I used to be and my oldest brother probably knew that I wasn't an easy prey anymore.

My other gay brother knew about the incest, but he didn't tell anyone about it. When I came out about the incest two years ago, another brother asked me why I didn't tell anyone at the time. In my sexually-repressed household, there was no way I could have done that.

Perhaps my brother woke up my sexual gayness. Unfortunately, this had two negative effects on me. First, it created impotence which lasted for ten years. Second, it forced me to enter the world of gayness through incest. I'm still trying to resolve that.

From age fifteen until eighteen I started having sexual encounters with my 35-or-40 year old cousin. It was good. One of my brothers knew that Claude was gay and he arranged it. He was a very good-looking man and I wanted him. I remained unable to ejaculate with him, however. It would still be a long time before that became possible.

In high school I was involved in the school newspaper and I played sports. I was never confronted with the idea of being gay until one day another student told me that I was a faggot. That was the only time that I heard that, and it wasn't positive. I think that I grew up in an environment where the word faggot was used in French more than the word gay.

My dad died in 1979, and I moved to Montreal the same year to work on a degree in history. Montreal was Mecca. The first day I went to the bar, however, I could have been a wall or a table: I wanted to hide because I was frightened. I didn't know any of these people. Also, gay bars tend to be dark, smoky places with loud music. We're not talking about a Monet painting with blue skies and flowers. Instead, the gay bar was a blurry situation where in front of you is movement and people talking. Some bars even specialize in looking like a dungeon. I continued exploring the gay bars from 1979 to 1981. I was making one more step toward my independence. I often went by myself. I had quite a few one-night stands, but I didn't have any long-term relationship. I never did in fact.

I developed a friendship with the world while I was in Montreal. I knew at that time that to be a positive gay person is not to be stuck in a gay ghetto. It is to be with the world. My sense of gay community wasn't made with walls: it was made with flowers and bridges that would reach people. I think life is about mixing people together as much as you can.

I spent three years in Montreal. I joined the university gay association there and developed a group of gay friends. There were about six of us. We talked about men and going out with men, we went to gay bars together, and we planned dances. We felt that being gay was about serving the community and helping the community to grow. That period of university was very meaningful to me. I still have a very deep feeling for these friends.

My second eldest gay brother, Guy, had recently finished a degree and lived with my mother for a few years. I think he took advantage of her financially. His actions were also disrespectful. Instead of being sincere with her about his gayness, he acted flippantly. I found that very hurtful because mom developed more hatred about being gay. I had to face her with coming out, and it was a horrible experience. My mom was a person who lived with gay sons but who didn't speak about it. It didn't exist to her, it was a nonexisting lifestyle.

One fall my mother visited me and discovered a gay magazine. At lunchtime, she brought the magazine to the table and asked, "*What's this?*" That was after dad's death, so she added "*dad would oppose that. What are you doing with that magazine?*" My mom was on the attack and I was on the defensive. She had read an article in that magazine about a priest who abused a child. That fed her disgusting view about homosexuality. I told her that I had sexual desire for men. She was horrified. The only images she had of gay people were purely negative. For her it was linked to sins like adultery and bigamy. She is a profound Catholic and she used to be a nun before she married. From that day forward I knew it wasn't going to be talked about again. Mom didn't speak to me for three days.

The idea that I might be gay became clearer when I moved to CEJEP, which is like a two-year college in Quebec. I was nineteen and I was away from family. I met two friends there that were gay. One of my teachers was gay and we became friends too. When I moved to CEJEP, I thought that I was going to be rejected because of my gayness. I told my friend Bonnie if I tell her three words, I will loose all my friends. I ending up telling her. I said "*I am gay*," and she said, "*you've not lost me*." At that moment I became more gay positive emotionally. I became unwilling to accept people who would not accept my gayness.

I learned the importance of making friends who would accept me, not merely tolerate me or try to change me slightly. What has really influenced my gay identity the most are my friends, and mostly my straight friends in fact. A lot of the friends I had were straight women. I think that if you look at the history of disclosing, I suspect that gay men have a better ear with women as compared to men. I felt I was bringing up something to my straight friends that was positive and that was very important to me. They had lots of questions for me, and that helped me to solidify my identity as a gay man.

I fell in love with a gay man while at CEJEP, but it became a sour relationship because I was only attracted to him physically. His spiritual side was not what I needed at the time. He was my first love. He came to visit me in the Gaspe Peninsula once, and my heart pounded. I wrote stories and poems about him, but I terminated the relationship rather drastically about a year or two later. Some of my straight friends sat me down and said I was wasting my time with him. Although it had never been anything sexual, he was unfaithful to me and a few others he dated. From this experience I knew that I was attracted to men.

In 1981, a year prior to finishing my degree, I met an English-speaking guy from Alberta. John was doing graduate work in Montreal. He knew how to speak French and I was attracted to him. He was the person that would turn my life 180 degrees around about gay positiveness. John had a lover at the time so we never dated, but he became one of my best gay friends.

I met another friend, Greg, the same year, and he has become one of my closest gay friends. Next to John, he became the second most influential person in my life. He now lives in Vancouver. He has never given up on me and I have never given up on him. John taught me the road and Greg said I'm going to walk with you on that road. They became the brothers I always wanted. Neither were nosy. They experienced my life with curiosity and without a desire to infiltrate or change me. They really respected me.

When John moved back to Alberta in 1981, he asked me if I would move back with him for the summer and learn English. I decided to do it. My family was not supportive of my plan. My eldest brother thought he was going to lose control over me. I found a job in a summer camp. John left me alone in his apartment as he was staying with his lover in Calgary. I started to learn English. John saw in me the power to learn something new and he really helped me to realize that I would become who I wanted to be.

That summer I had the time of my life and this is when I realized that Edmonton would become a cornerstone in my life. The next summer I worked again at the same camp. I began to realize that I had something special for kids and I decided that I would work with kids for a long time in my life. When I returned to Montreal, I finished my degree. I thought I wanted to do a masters degree in history so I moved back to the Gaspe to spend a year with my mom. Everything was very positive with my mom. We never talked about my gayness of course, but I am her youngest son and there is a special relationship between us, especially since dad passed away.

My year there, however, is when I suffered my first depression. This is when my past sexual abuse began to churn within me. Although I had completed a year toward my masters degree, I stopped and returned to Montreal. I went for therapy to deal with the incest, and in doing so I became confused about my sexual orientation. I developed doubts about whether I was gay or not. I needed to learn to become comfortable with who I was sexually, and eventually it happened. The therapy helped me regain confidence in myself, and then I registered at the University of Alberta to take a degree in education.

In 1986, I confronted my eldest gay brother regarding the abuse in a letter. He replied that this was a chip on my shoulder and that he really doesn't recall any of it. This fall he wanted to come here and visit me. I told him I wasn't interested in having him. I told him I didn't want him around me. The last stage is the one where I will confront him one day and tell him exactly what my heart feels. That's the stage where I will forgive him, but I can't do that right now.

There is a lot of disenchantment in my family because I told some of my brothers about the incest approximately two years ago. Right now, I have a very poor relationship with my gay brothers and a good or excellent relationship with my straight brothers.

As I discovered my sexuality from 1984 through 1987, I gradually gained control of ejaculation. One of my first lovers, Ben, was in 1985. I was now being sexual and loving it. I was also more open about my feelings sexually. Ben was a man that I deeply loved and the physical aspect was excellent. Ben confirmed in me that inside the bed and outside the bed was great, but he had another lover that he would see once in a while. After a while, I couldn't deal with sharing him with somebody else. I made a drawing for him which had many doors in front of me and it symbolized the choice I had to make about being gay and wanting to learn about it.

I was not surprised and somewhat glib when one of my friends, Luke, told me that he was HIV positive. Luke sent me a message that I should get tested. He died in 1987. Another close friend who lived two blocks away from me died the same year. This was my first visual encounter with AIDS and that was very frightening. I was trying to decide if I would get tested or not and suddenly around me people were dying of AIDS. It had a major impact on me. It didn't take long for me to realize that what was in my friend's backyard was now in my backyard.

I felt somewhat of a dilemma between 1986 and 1989 before I got tested. In 1989, maturity became a little vulture in my life. As it flew above me, it gave me a little artist view of a reality I had not faced. I had played ping-pong with my doctor: was I going to get tested or not? I used to panic and cry when I heard that some of the men that I had had sexual encounters with were infected with HIV.

At the end of June 1989 I got tested. The result was positive. I sat down and felt that everything had collapsed on me. However, my world didn't collapse. Instead, I entered a new coming-out process.

Each decade had its new process of coming out. I first came out as a gay man, and it helped prepare me for this second coming-out as a person with HIV. For example, I don't think I would have been able to deal with it in 1985. I think I would have killed myself.

I am now two kinds of gay positive. I am the positive gay and HIV positive. So there we go! Unfortunately, from 1984 until 1989 is possibly when I would have infected the most people with HIV. That is a very sad thought for me.

I told you earlier about my first lover, Ben. Just before he died from AIDS, he told me he was sorry that he poisoned my life. I told him that he didn't know he was infected when he was with me. We had had unsafe sex, but I had also had other sexual partners. I told Ben that I could not pinpoint who I contracted the virus from. Anyway, it was important for him to say that to me. Likewise, it was important for me to tell him that he had enriched my life and I'm glad for that.

It took me years to tell my friends. I think that with HIV the coming out is more the coming in. You have to do some inside cleaning first. You have to go through the anxiety and all that. Then you have to search inside of yourself before you are able to tell. You have to go through guilt, you have to go through losing friends to AIDS. You panic for yourself, you panic for others, they die and you go *"oh my God, I will too."* It was nine months before I told one close friend. One friend told me to never cry about that. She helped me believe that I would be able to deal with it. One of my strengths is that I am a positive person. I love life. That's a very important aspect of who I am.

I didn't have sex from when I received my results until 1993. My decision was based on fear. At times I felt hopeless. It's not easy telling people who are potential sexual encounters that I am HIV positive. My HIV isn't going to run and hide in a closet. It will be with me for the remainder of my life.

In 1992 I decided to attend an AIDS organization so I could belong to a group of others who are HIV positive. This is when I began to integrate more positive thoughts about being HIV positive. I started to tell more people too. Then I met somebody with whom I started having a relationship. He was also HIV positive, but his health was not good. This was such a profound event for me because I really fell for him and I really had a good time with him. It was also very difficult because he felt incapable of building a long-term relationship. Our relationship lasted a summer. I wanted to date somebody again after this experience. I started to have some sexual encounters again.

Telling my friends became another positive bridge. Although being HIV positive was a sad revelation, it turned out to be another wonderful event. When you tell somebody that you are HIV positive, there is an outpour of very deep feelings. When I finally told my closest brother, he told me how much he loved me. The revelation creates a deadline to your life and your relationships. The HIV virus has taught me the importance of friendship as a gay man. It reinforced for me the importance of cherishing the moment. This has also taught me to respect life because each person that departs this earth has left me with something.

I have chosen not to tell my two gay brothers that I am HIV positive. One major reason why I wouldn't tell my eldest brother is that he is a gay moralist. He has a Reagan vision of AIDS: "*you deserve it. You were looking for it. Good for you.*" I wrote down my will this summer and really outlined that this brother cannot be at my bedside when I die. I might change my mind if something happens between him and I, but not right now. I think that a part of me also says that I feel a certain guilt.

Nobody knows at school that I'm either gay or HIV positive. Some of them know or suspect strongly that I'm gay but I have never told them. My HIV status hasn't been disclosed at all. I am thinking seriously about it right now. When I become ill, I don't want it to create a big collapse, downfall, or crisis. I need pillars at school too because I need friends to help me go through this.

I want to draw three close friends who have died of AIDS in the sky. Three of them holding hands with a ribbon in the middle. In front of them would be the earth. The ribbon would have written on it something like "*please help me to go through that.*" That's my spiritual bond. What I do in my art I do in my teaching and in my approach to life.

My gay identity has been challenged by being HIV positive from the perspective that AIDS is still a closeted thing. Why is it closeted? The more educated you get the more you learn to not do this and not to do that. The dilemma with being HIV is if you don't have a partner or if you're not in a monogamous relationship, you will need to meet people to have sex with them. You have to work on saying to yourself, *"I am HIV but this doesn't mean I am a second-class citizen."* You are not a bad person because you are HIV positive. There are many gay men who have had more sexual partners than you, and they remain HIV negative. Some of my friends told me, *"Fréderic, you got infected and I still wonder why I didn't get infected."* You have to stop making self-accusations. I have a sense that maybe a part of me has done something wrong, however. I haven't been able to totally cleanse myself of that feeling.

Since 1993 I have had experiences where I would sleep with someone whom I felt a relationship with might be possible. Then I tell him about my HIV status and suddenly it's over, it's gone. I'm not going to tell you that I get out of bed at that time with a big smile on my face. I usually run to the table and do art. I would like to say to these people who run, *"my name is Fréderic, my name is not HIV."* You could see Fréderic and HIV and I would be fine with it, or you could see Fréderic alone and I'm fine with it, but if you see HIV and you don't see Fréderic, I can't deal with that. I am 37 and I've spent 30 years of my life not knowing I was HIV positive and only seven knowing I am HIV positive.

I believe that having other gay individuals around me who are HIV positive, gay or not, and having to tell friends has helped me become a positive gay man, and a man who has a positive attitude about being HIV positive. I have found a tremendous power with friends. I have also discovered another power: my family. The three brothers I told and their wives are highly supportive.

When you have a terminal illness, you need to do what I call "house cleaning." You will need to deal with unresolved issues if you want to have a better happening or ending of your life. Also to deal with the life you have remaining. To date, I have not had any major illnesses related to HIV, but I have experienced a few minor symptoms. I have felt fatigue occasionally. I made a decision this year to slow down. I did too much and I paid a price.

I am very sensitive these days about being with families. I need one thing right now: children. I think the child in me and the child that expresses itself is wonderful. The children I teach have told me many times, *"boy you're crazy,"* and that's because they see that I don't judge. When I go to a family, I really want the kids to know that I am gay. A balanced family was missing in my life, and I want children to know that I am another member of this society in a family setting and it feels good.

One of my goals is to experience family as a gay positive person. My sense is that my own blood family isn't here. I don't intend to move back to Quebec, but there is a longing. As a gay man belonging is not everything to me, but it still means a lot. We grow and we participate together. As we go through thick and thin, remember that these two highways are not side-by-side. They eventually link.

My philosophy of life rests on one very important theme: it's not what happens to you that matters, but what you do with it. Upon reflection, I had the happiest childhood anybody could have until age ten. It got a bit more mixed up between fourteen and twenty. My twenties were about recapturing a sense of my life, and my thirties have been about learning a new aspect to integrate into my life.

February 8, 1997

Unsure if I was in the right place, I walked into a huge room brimming over with hundreds of men, women, and children. Why so many children? Children's drawings were everywhere, and off centre were large replicas of crayons that symbolized his art. The music played Pachebel while I took one of the few seats left at the back. Fréderic passed away on February 2, 1997. He died suddenly, peacefully, and unexpectedly.

A man who touched the lives of many. A gay man who loved life, and who was described as having an uncanny ability to make people laugh and brighten their day. His own sense of humor was nearly insane, usually off the wall and always unpredictable. I can see why so many of his young students loved him. I can see why everyone loved him.

The ninety minute bilingual memorial was a celebration. I don't understand French. I didn't need to, to understand the impact of this man. The words were only the surface for a depth that I and hundreds of others admired.

There were more laughs than I had expected. Seated in the back row was one who wasn't yet ready to laugh. He hadn't yet had enough time to grieve this remarkable man whom he knew for only three hours.

Thank you, God, for three hours.

(journal entry, February 8, 1997).

CO-RESEARCHER #8: *"TOMMY"*

Present Occupation: Sales/Marketing Representative

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
42	20	5

July 23, 1997

Sometimes we don't have to look far for suitable co-researchers. "Tommy" has been a friend of mine for the past three years. I knew that back in the 1970's, he had published a gay magazine in Calgary. What would inspire someone to take such a visible step? I interviewed him at his apartment on November 9, 1996 to find out.

Tommy's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *Acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation. Belief that homosexuality enriches life in a unique way. Appreciating the unique influence that homosexuality has on life experience.*

Tommy's Story:

I grew up in a small town in New Brunswick. At its peak, the population was 2,000 residents. There were only 22 of us in my graduation class in high school. Positive images of gay people didn't exist there. There was always talk about the school board secretary who sucked boys off. That was a common mythology when I was in high school, and it was considered horrible.

I wanted to leave this town from a young age as there was nothing that stimulated me. There was no place to go to get experience. The focus was sports, and I wasn't good at them and I never really enjoyed them either. No one wanted me on their team. I wanted to take music lessons, but we didn't have the resources for that.

I didn't have any real friends in high school, so consequently I was quite isolated. I think I isolated myself. I remember that horrid feeling of trying to deny the fact that I was gay to avoid criticism.

I had been feeling sexually gay since I was really young. Some of the games I played as a preschooler contained sexual overtones. We used to take turns running around and pulling our pants down, and I found that highly erotic. As a youngster I used to play this game with a peer in his father's workshop. I wanted to see his naked body.

I was called a faggot more than most kids. My brother, for example, played hockey so he fit in more. My brother had lots of friends but I didn't. I was just different enough. Because my mother was a teacher, kids didn't like her. I think they took out their frustrations toward her on me. I remember getting beat up on the way to school and back from school.

I definitely had sexual fantasies at age ten. There was a kid in my class and I day dreamed about wanting to be with him naked and see him naked. I remember sneaking peaks at muscle magazines and actually stealing pornographic magazines when I was around ten-years old. I remember getting a brochure once in the mail which had a picture of the statue of David in his glorious nudeness. I had that under my pillow for months. These unclad pictures became important parts of my sexual fantasies.

I was conscious in grade seven that I didn't particularly like females. I finally had a date with a girl and I felt embarrassed about going to a dance with her. I thought she was really nice, but I wasn't motivated. It didn't make a lot of sense to me. It was around this time that I started distinguishing between guys I found attractive and those I didn't.

I tried asking girls out on dates in high school, but I didn't feel like I fit into the straight community. My self-image remained really low. There was one particular guy in my class that I found very stimulating. We used to sit next to each other for a couple of classes. I felt a very strong attraction toward him.

Wanting to learn about homosexuality, I turned to books like the Encyclopedia Britannica and the World Book of Knowledge, but they did not provide particularly positive images or ideas about it. I was finding male bodies very stimulating, but I couldn't legitimately accept these feelings. I didn't feel good about having homoerotic attractions as a teenager. That was a really negative period for me. By the time I was out of high school, I really didn't like myself and I didn't have any friends. I was very insecure for a long period in my life.

I had my first sexual experience with a male when I was eighteen. My forty-year-old cousin-in-law, Jerry, seduced me. Although he was married with two kids, I suspect that seducing young boys was something he did periodically. I knew the whole score. I think I had fantasized this was going to happen before it actually happened. One night we camped out together and he got me very drunk. Then he suggested that I sleep with him and that's where it started. It went on for about a year. He was an alcoholic, which was a bad scene for me. It seemed that for many years, I became attracted to alcoholic homosexuals. I believe this experience with my cousin-in-law was largely to blame.

After the affair with Jerry, I felt total self-denial of having experienced gay sexuality. I didn't have the self-confidence to believe that my feelings were legitimate. I wanted to be like everyone else. I thought having sexual relationships with women would help. Although it occurred a few times, I didn't find it particularly satisfying.

I wasn't at that point classified as a faggot, but other kids in that community were and it was considered to be really negative to be gay. I wanted to leave my hometown, so in 1975, I moved to Calgary and attended university. This was definitely a quest to seek out gay people.

While reading sociology, I began to realize that stigma is something that is ascribed to you and not something you are. That helped me understand that being gay itself was not a negative thing. Realizing that society's values may be in conflict with your own helped me accept my own individuality . . . that being gay is legitimate and I'm okay.

During my second year of university, I accepted myself as a gay person and came out of the closet. I never had any ambivalence about being gay. My sexual fantasies were always with males. I started telling people that I'm gay and it felt great. I had some meetings with people at the gay information service in Calgary, and I started accepting myself more and met some gay people. I became focused on meeting a guy my own age and having a relationship. I remember reading a very positive book about homosexuality and homosexual experience written by Tripp. Positive books like this one were uncommon in those days.

During that period of time three of us formed the first gay organization at the University of Calgary. We put up posters in gay bars and at the gay information service. The three of us created our own peer group this way. We became very assertive about our gay identity. We weren't afraid to be seen putting up gay posters and suffer stigmatization. On one occasion we had put up posters in the morning and later noticed that they had been torn down. We followed the trail and found the culprit. I jumped him and we began fighting. It created quite a disturbance. Although such experiences were struggle-oriented, they jelled my identity and that was positive. During that period, I wanted everybody in my personal world to know I was gay.

In order to develop a positive gay identity, I needed to alter the negative stereotypes of gay people. The term "gay" was derogatory, and it implied being less of a human being and it was "sick." Who would want to be gay if this were true? I needed to accept the fact that I was gay and appreciate its legitimacy: that it was okay, that it was fine. I should clarify that my low self-esteem was not simply the result of being gay. There were a lot of other issues too.

As I began to declare my gayness to the world, that was very liberating and helpful to my self-esteem. It represented a self-accepting attitude that said I'm no longer hiding, I'm not ashamed, and its okay to have sex and fall in love with men.

I fell in love with Michael, who was one of the other founders of our gay organization. That was a very significant relationship which lasted for a couple of years. My gay identity felt pretty secure during that period. When we broke up, however, I went through a very strong emotional crisis. I stopped pursuing a committed relationship for years. Partly I was afraid, and partly I lost confidence when this relationship ended. I felt like a failure.

I came out to my parents because I wanted to be closer to them. It was disastrous. I wrote them a letter and told them I was gay. Subsequently, I received long letters from my dad telling me it was a sin and that it was horrible, and how could I disappoint my mother and my grandfather and all of these people. It's sick, you should get counselling, etcetera.

I figured if they didn't understand this then there was just no sense in continuing a relationship. I didn't go home for over five years and I didn't write them, although my mother kept writing. At some point I just said, *"well, that's their attitude and they're still my parents"* and I started going home again. We just didn't talk about my being gay. Before my dad died, he went out of his way to let me know that he accepted the fact that I was gay. It was a very slow process. My mother and I still don't talk about it.

I didn't anticipate it would be this difficult for them to accept my gayness, but even if I knew this before hand, I would still have told them. I was willing to give up everything because I accepted myself. It was my liberation. It was like a religious experience, finally feeling whole and not hiding anymore. I wasn't going to play games with my parents. I told them because I wanted to become closer to them.

Regarding spirituality, I rejected the teachings of the Catholic church quite quickly and easily. I realized it was an agent of social control, so I felt no remorse or loss in spurning it. I'm more collective in terms of my religious beliefs and I think if you read the bible, the emphasis is on community and friendship with very little focus actually on sexuality. The sexuality in religion was imposed by the Catholic Church.

By 1980 I was no longer involved with the gay club. I developed a relationship with Carrie which lasted for a year-and-a-half. We were very good friends, she knew I was gay, and out of personal intimacy we developed a sexual relationship. Our sex life was satisfying, but I would compare it to sleeping with a man you don't find very attractive sexually.

Eventually, she wanted more than I was prepared to give. I lacked motivation to become more committed to her. When I started dating other guys and having relationships with them, it became more difficult for her to accept me as a friend. She still wanted to have sex, but I wasn't interested. I was seeking out male relationships, not female relationships. It doesn't mean I didn't love her, however. I felt very close to her. We continued to be fairly good friends for a long time while we both dated other boyfriends.

I was fairly independent in that I didn't like volunteering within the established gay community organizations. Instead, I started my own gay tabloid in Calgary in 1983 and 1984. Only three issues were published, but it was over a full year. I was very positive then, very action oriented, and I loved it. We had a gay march one day and a picture of it appeared in our paper. It was very extroverted, very out. We were doing it for the community and I think I was quite radical. I wanted to change people's attitude about being gay. I felt that the city at that time was pretty negative. The gay bars were the biggest element in the community and unfortunately, they continue to be in Calgary.

At that point my gay relationships didn't really seem to take any particular direction. I had gone through a very public time of being gay, and after stopping production of the magazine, I dropped out of the gay community almost completely. I never went to gay dances, I never went to any organizational meetings. I think I had saturated myself with being gay. In my early thirties, I stopped having sexual relationships. Partly it was fear of AIDS, and partly it was my own attitude. My gay life had stopped. This went on for eight or nine years.

When I started having sex again, it was tremendous. Three years ago I met Robert, and although our relationship only lasted three months, it was very significant to me. After Robert I had a couple of tenuous sexual flirtations and then I dated Brent for a year. It was a non-conventional relationship: enjoyable, but limiting. I realized that it wasn't really going anywhere. It ended. I wanted a committed relationship by this point.

I'm now accepting the fact that I can have relationships with people and it doesn't have to be a terrifying event if it ends. I think that is a part of my identity now. I don't think I have to define myself in terms of a relationship either. I would like to have an intimate friendship that could maybe evolve into a relationship, but I don't need it.

I don't think I have had a lot of really positive gay people in my life. I've become more cognizant of the negative influences in my life. I am trying to associate with more positive individuals. For example, Brent never drank at all. At that level, I feel that was a very positive relationship. I've discovered that it is possible to have a better quality relationship now as an older gay person then I did when I was younger. I am more accepting of myself and more accepting of other people. I'm optimistic that I will find another relationship, but it will take some time. Establishing a positive gay relationship has not been an easy task for me. This is my challenge.

Another challenge in developing a positive gay identity is learning how to survive in a straight world as a gay person without compromising your values. The world in which we live is predominantly heterosexual and it supports that lifestyle. You really have to look deeper if you want to find things that are gay positive.

To continue developing a positive gay identity, I would like to pursue activities that will help me meet another male for a long-term relationship. I want to be open to it. I'm also thinking about aging and where I will be in 10, 20, and 30 years. Now that I'm in my 40's, those issues have become more important. My gay identity will influence the direction I go in the future with respect to decisions I make about long-term lifestyle.

An issue I still need to resolve for myself concerns co-dependents and alcoholism in the gay community. I once chose friendships with people who were abusing drugs and alcohol. Sometimes I wonder why, and my best answer is that I surrounded myself with people who wouldn't challenge me. I changed that attitude at some point. I went through a period of rejecting people who were alcoholic and I'm still very conscious of that when I meet people. If they abuse substances, I don't want to associate with them. I now chose friends who are non-substance abusers.

From an identity point of view, struggling with alcoholism, co-dependency, and drug abuse were definitely themes in my life. I used to smoke a lot of grass. Was there a fundamental flaw in my self-acceptance? Did it tie into the fact that I was gay? Was it rooted in other elements of my personality? It's not easy to put my finger on these things. I think when I came out I had a very positive identity. These other issues became more important in my life than my gay identity.

In the 1990's, I have wondered about the influence of pornography in my life. I was highly addicted to it for a number of years. It became a mental exercise to have an orgasm without consuming pornography at the same time. It took a lot of effort to get it out of my life. I wasn't sure I could do it, but I've done it. I think an addiction is when it prevents you from doing something else that you would place value on. I think my addiction to pornography kept me from pursuing intimate relationships.

I still meet people today who can't come out to their families for a multitude of reasons and they end up living a double life. Some get married, some are our age and some are younger than us. There are kids in their twenties who are still getting married to appear straight and yet they know they are really gay. This boggles my mind. I understand that it's their personal choice, but I don't think it's particularly positive. I think being gay infers being honest with yourself.

CO-RESEARCHER #9: *"CLIFF"*

Present Occupation: Entertainer and Bartender

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
31	12	5

Recollections, July 30, 1997

The gay community is very diverse. There are also subcultures within the gay world, and I wanted to take a glimpse into two of them that are highly visible: leathermen and drag queens. What is their experience of positive gay identity? Does it differ from those of us who are more conventional?

A close gay friend of mine in Edmonton is well-connected with these subcultures. I asked him if he knew of a drag queen who presents as having a positive gay identity. He mentioned "Cliff" as one of the best examples he knew. Cliff's reputation precedes him as he is well known in the Edmonton scene. I interviewed him on November 13, 1996.

Cliff's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *Being a friendly, positive influence on friends and people I have recently just met, having an open mind and a weird sense of humor.*

Cliff's Story:

My life began in a small town west of Edmonton. I've always known that I was gay and I think mom knew too. Even as a young child, I felt like a normal kid with a secret. I knew I was different, but I didn't have a label for it.

My mother put me in figure skating at age five, and two years later I picked up hockey as well. I figure skated in the early morning, followed immediately by hockey. The other hockey players came onto the ice as I switched from my figure skates to my hockey skates. They used to raze me a lot, saying things like *"well, you know, only girls figure skate."* Nothing really hurtful.

I was a nellie child, but I never put myself down for it. I've never felt that I was unworthy or bad. I remember being called a fag even before I knew what it meant. Everybody called everybody a fag in my school. The girls were bitches and the guys were fags.

During a regular scrimmage game, I got struck near my eye with a hockey stick. It could have blinded me if it had been an inch closer. I decided that I was not going to be in a game where people are actually trying to hurt me. If I was going to be on the ice, I would be the one to hurt myself by wiping out on figure skates. I subsequently quit hockey. I still like to play sports, but I am not big on watching them.

Since around age seven or eight, I remember checking out guys in the change room at the outdoor swimming pool and at the hockey arena. The junior hockey team was ages sixteen to twenty. Watching all of these guys running around in their jock straps was a lot of fun. I used to go all the time. I would notice someone with a great body, but that was it. I didn't have actual sexual feelings toward males until somewhere between ages eleven and thirteen. I never thought it was wrong to look.

When I was twelve or thirteen, I owned a bunch of gay pornographic magazines. I knew that this was okay. If it was bad, there wouldn't be so many magazines and books on the market. I just couldn't do anything about it. None of the sexual stuff ever happened. Although I had heard of other kids having sexual experiences during sleep overs, I never did because I knew what I was and I knew that I didn't want to ruin a friendship. I wasn't attracted to any of them either. I've always been attracted to older men. I'm still that way.

My dad is a retired construction worker, and with a grade six or seven education, he became a self-made millionaire. He was alcoholic and both emotionally and physically abusive.

I remember a few times where he had friends over late at night and he'd wake us from sleep to do pushups for his friends and then one arm pushups until we were exhausted.

He beat up on all of us at home. I moved to Edmonton with my aunt and cousins when I was thirteen because I thought I was to blame for his abusiveness. I was different, which frustrated him, and he didn't know how to react to me.

I was also smoking marijuana and going through a turbulent adolescence. I was a bad, rotten teenager: crabby and skipping school. I was quite mixed up and I had to go. Both of my parents were having trouble handling me. I thought everything would be okay if I left. He became even more abusive to the others at home, however. Although he's now mellowed, he's still crabby.

My dad does not or chooses not to understand anything about my gayness. There is no room in his life for gays. I may be putting words in his mouth because he has never said anything, but he won't accept me. Rather than bring it up, he won't even talk to me.

The last big episode with my dad occurred at a family reunion. I had no interest in going because I consider my family to be here: my gay family, that is. My friends are my family. They are the ones that make me feel loved. There are a number of friendly people in my family of origin and I like a lot of them, but there isn't love there. I'm the token gay relative and I won't be that.

I told mom I wouldn't be at the reunion so dad would go. He went, and he was really crabby. My cousin had a fight with him at the reunion. He defended me to dad by explaining that I wasn't any less of a person just because I'm gay. At Christmas another cousin got in on dad and told him that if he wasn't such a prick, Cliff would be here too. He just refuses to deal with it. He won't accept that he has a gay son.

His birthday is on New Year's Eve so usually mom will phone me or I'll phone her. She tells me to wish my dad a happy birthday and I'll go *"Happy New Year, happy birthday!"* and he'll go *"ya"* before giving the phone back to mom. Last year I was the only sibling to phone him on his birthday, and yet I'm the only one he doesn't talk to. There's no connection between us and we have nothing in common. We haven't had any real communication for 13 years. I wish he loved me, but he doesn't.

Conversation with my entire family is difficult. They are a dysfunctional family. My sister was spoiled because she was the baby and she was the girl. Today we get along very well.

My brother and I never got along. We were always at odds with each other. We'd run around the house screaming and yelling, throwing knives at each other, and slamming the door.

Now my brother is a "coke head" (i.e., cocaine). He smashes the cars and trucks that dad buys him and he racks up driving charges. And in my dad's mind, I'm the bad one? I haven't seen my brother for about six years. We live different lives and we have nothing in common. He's straight, married, has a baby, and is now getting a divorce.

I came out to my mom five or six years ago. She already knew I was gay. She had found my gay pornographic magazines when I was twelve or thirteen. I went over to her place and showed her a bunch of drag videos: shows from the bar and some from the Fringe Festival. After watching the videos she said, *"well, you're pretty, you look like you have fun, and you're very good at it, as long as you're happy*." Finding out that I did drag wasn't much of a shock to her. She had already seen drag queens before. Her main concern was that I wouldn't contract the HIV virus.

When I was fourteen, I was sitting at a bus stop and a van pulled up with two guys in it. They asked me if I wanted a ride. They were both smiling and very good looking and I thought, *"hum, sure I'll take a ride*." They were in their twenties, and they were lovers. I didn't know that at the time. They dropped me off and suggested that I call them for a ride back after I finished visiting my friend. I did.

They took me over to their place and we smoked a couple of joints. We started having sex, and I ended up staying with them until I was seventeen-years old. They were a couple and I was the third, but they never made me feel like I wasn't welcome. They loved each other and they were a couple and I was with both of them equally. It was great. They both had very varied interests and they both were very different. One was a locksmith while the other etched glass. He was very creative and turned me on to a lot of different types of music. One was more effeminate and the other was more butch. I brought them something they didn't have or we wouldn't have been together that long. I was their kid.

At age fifteen, I went to a gay bar with one of them and within half an hour, I had fourteen Black Russians on the table. I had a sip of each one and then we left. I thought that was kind of fun!

I eventually moved out from these guys because they were moving to Vancouver. I met a photographer when I was eighteen or nineteen, and I became his assistant. I went with him to

Saskatoon for six months. He then took me to Regina. Although we related to each other sexually, it didn't last very long. He was a 33-year-old baby.

I've never had a lover. I've had lots of boyfriends but I've never actually had a lover. I've never gone with anyone for more then a month. I would define a lover as someone I would live with and be with for at least a year.

No guy wants to be called Mr. "Rachel." Rachel is my stage name when I am in drag. They want to be who they are. My friends will say something like *"here comes Rachel and Rachel's boyfriend."* They don't have their own name, they have my name. It's like Elizabeth Taylor's husband is Elizabeth Taylor's husband. A lot of guys don't want to deal with that. I don't expect them to.

I'm very independent and a lot of people can't keep up to me. I have many projects: I'm doing a calendar, I'm planning a show, I'm doing choreography, I'm making a tape. I always have these things, plus drawing and painting. Consequently, I'm not ready for a lover. I'm not ready to settle down. Maybe when I'm sixty-five I'll get together with someone. I'm not the marrying kind.

I have been in love once. He was only interested in being my friend, however. We never got together sexually. We had coffee, we painted, we chatted, we had fun. He was my dream guy. It really hurt when he passed away.

Before I tell you about my life as a drag queen, let me share with you some early memories. In terms of cross-gender behaviors, my brother, sister, cousins and I would dress up in grandma's playroom when I was young. All of us dressed up as girls. There were no boy clothes there. I always used to wear this yellow dress.

I was just being a ham. I'm entertaining and I like to put on a show. Some people think I'm on twenty-four hours a day and constantly thinking of something to say or do or be silly. I am when I'm at work and sometimes when I'm at home. It's not so much I need attention but I just get on a roll and all of a sudden I'm getting it: the laughs and the fun. I just knew there was something there. At the time I didn't think of cross dressing on a regular basis or doing drag. That came years later. When I did, though, I thought, *"yep, I can do this."* I knew I needed practice so that I could be really convincing.

In case you were wondering, let me be clear: I don't want to be a woman, I am happy being a gay man. "I'm a man in a dress with a dink" is my philosophy when I'm out. A drag queen is simply a man who dresses up. If somebody says *"you're such a great woman,"* I've done it right. After fifteen years I should be doing it right. If not, I should give it up.

The difference between a drag queen and a female impersonator is money. Female impersonators get paid for a gig. Drag queens often call me a female impersonator. I have been a professional female illusionist for events like the Edmonton Fringe Festival, for example. In general, drag queens provide free volunteer shows or they perform in fundraisers.

There is a wide scope to drag, and everyone does it for different reasons. There are drag queens that do it for attention. There are some that will do it and take their teeth out, as in some older guys who don't really strive to look like a woman. They just want to be silly, have fun, and entertain. I think a lot of guys do drag to hide their ugly male self. If they don't like themselves, they make themselves look prettier. That is not a healthy phenomena. Some drag queens get off on the underwear. They're more like transvestites. There are others who grow boobs and have a dink and they want to be half and half. Most guys who get the breast implants or the hormones and stuff don't actually pursue surgery.

The way I see it, the difference between drag and leather is that leather is more sexual for leathermen than drag is for drag queens. In another sense, they are both forms of drag in that they are both costumes, although uniform may be a better word to describe a leatherman's outfit. I think it has a little bit to do with if you want to feel butch and masculine or look butch and masculine, then you do leather. If you want to experience your girl side then you do drag. So they're part and parcel but they're different. I would say these forms of costumery are part of gay identity.

For me, drag is about entertainment. It is fun to dress up. When I'm Rachel, I'm still me and I still act like me. I don't throw attitude and I'm not bitter, unless that is part of the character I'm impersonating. Even if I'm dressed as that character, when my performance is done I go back to acting like myself. That's where I'm at with it. I like being gay and male. I like having a wiener. I like gay men and I'm not attracted to women. It's fun to dress up but that's about it.

In Regina is where I first did drag. It wasn't good drag, however. No eye shadow and no eyelashes. My friend and I were hanging around a lesbian and we went through her closet one day. We decided to dress up, go to the bar, and see whether we would be noticed. We got a lot of attention so we did it for a couple weeks. By this time I wanted to move back to Alberta, and I moved to Calgary in 1980.

In Calgary I started getting into MDA, acid, mushrooms, mescaline, and other weird drugs. I started hanging out with a street hooker, and we dressed up in drag together. Guys would think I was a woman. I was young, I still didn't have to shave. It wasn't about sex. It was about trying to pass as a woman, and getting away with it.

I met a lot of street people and learned a little street lingo. I started doing more and more drag and more and more drugs. One day, I couldn't remember what my boy name was. I was nineteen or twenty. I cut off the nails and the hair. I went home to Edmonton and dried out in the basement for six months or so. I decided that this is not where I'm heading, not what I want to do. I don't need to con people.

When I returned to Edmonton, I rebuilt my old friendships and gained a hundred more. Edmonton has always been very stable for me. It's my ground. I'll live there probably forever. It's the "big onion" . . . a town so nice it makes you want to cry.

It took me about a year to decide I wanted to do drag in the bar. At a local gay bar, I learned blocking, lighting, and sound. I got a lot of stage experience and I started backing up accomplished drag performers. I began getting my own shows in 1984. That was really fun and I realized that is where I was headed with drag. I wanted to be on stage. I was painfully shy until I starting doing drag in Edmonton, and it really turned me around. We started doing productions like Grease, Chorus Line, and Cabaret. After 1987 it became my responsibility to put things together and choreograph shows. I was really happy because that is what I wanted to do.

I used to smoke marijuana every day back then. My roommate and I would wake up, smoke a joint, and go down to the bar at noon or so. We would stare at the wall while drinking coffee, trying to wake up. Then we'd smoke another joint, update the bulletin boards for upcoming events, smoke another joint, and then sit around and have another coffee before dinner. That was my routine for eight years.

I still wanted to pursue guys as a guy, but it's amazing how many people hit on you when you're in drag. They don't want the person that is behind the drag, they want the person in drag. I don't take anybody home and leave my wig on. I've never actually gone home with anyone while I was in drag unless I knew them and I had already slept with them. There is no interest on my part if they want a transvestite or a transsexual.

In my career to date, I have performed hundreds of different characters while in drag. They're not all celebrities, but they're my impersonation or my interpretation of them. For example, my stage name has its own character. Rachel is a lounge-singer bubble head, and she's a comedian. So I might do Rachel as Nora Desmond, or I might do Carol Burnett's Gloria Swanson. I haven't done K. D. Lang lately. That's another one. A man impersonating a woman, impersonating a lesbian. So it's a parody on a parody on a parody.

The Imperial Sovereign Court is the drag queen organization, although it includes many lesbigays[18] and straights who are not drag queens. I'm still part of the organization, although I've kind of petered out in the last five years, and lost interest.

There are six courts in Canada: Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Toronto and Lexington, Ontario. It started as a fun outlet for girls[19] to get together, plan a show, do a big production, entertain people, and raise some money for a benefit or a cause. Then titles were introduced. You were emperor and empress and prince and princess and imperial crown princess and then imperial crown duke and duchess and ladies and lords. It was all meant in fun. Everyone got a title.

I wouldn't wish drag on my best friend or my worst enemy because it's really hard. It's very competitive. Not so much here but it is competitive if you're going to be on a circuit and entertain and perform.

Do drag queens get stigmatized within the gay community? Definitely. It doesn't matter how hard you try because you're still going to get criticized. Gay people tend not to hit: instead they talk and talk. They can stab you in the back with their words rather than with an actual knife. There is always chatter and gossip and misconstrued stories and traumas. I find fags like to be catty and they like to be tacky, but there's a limit. It's not about hurting people's feelings.

The only harassment I've experienced is from rude taxi drivers. One time when a driver realized my friend and I were guys, he sped up and drove dangerously fast and we said, *"you know, we don't have to be here yesterday!"* We got out of his car a little shaken, but we were okay. He wasn't shouting anything at us but he was glaring at us in his rear view mirror. I find that a lot of cab drivers are like that once you tell them you're going to a gay bar. And then it's like, *"I got fags in the car!"*

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[18] A new word used to describe individuals who are either lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

[19] Slang term for gay male, particularly used to describe those who are effeminate.

I don't see a need to show to most people that I am gay. When I meet new people and they ask me, I tell them truthfully. If they don't ask, then I don't bring it up. I don't think it's important. I'm an "in-and-out" fag. I'm not into participating in pride marches and stuff either. It's just not me. I agree that we need to be heard and such, but I don't push it. I don't ram it down people's throats because I see no need for that. I don't disagree with the ones that are loud, but I'm not a loud person as far as being gay. It's not how I operate or how I work.

A new issue for me as a gay man working in a bar is learning how to deal with crabby lesbians. They are not all like that of course, but dealing with the ones that are is like dealing with really butch fags. I can get along with them, but it's different.

I also need to learn how to be in a relationship. I know how to get along with people, but I have to learn how to be a little more open with my feelings toward a loved one.

I think everybody is going to answer your question differently about what is a gay positive identity. I just am a positive identity. I don't think of it as gay or straight. Gay doesn't rule my life. I am, so I'm fine with that. When I meet you, I won't go *"hi, I'm gay."* I'll go, *"hi, I'm Cliff. And you might as well know my other name is Rachel, because you are going to hear someone call me that."*

I think just being happy and being friendly and nice to people is positive for a gay situation of any kind. If you are generally easy going, happy, and content with what you're doing, and you're who you are, then no one can shoot you down. No one can say that you're doing the wrong thing because you're the one who has to look in the mirror in the morning. It's you who you have to face.

CO-RESEARCHER #10: *"PAUL"*

Present Occupation: Retired (Primary Career: Retail)

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
48	36	5-to-6

Recollections, August 1, 1997

As I mentioned in Fréderic's story, a fellow psychologist suggested I contact Paul. He is another gay man living with HIV.

November 7, 1996

It wasn't until I had spoken to Paul for a few minutes when my memory jarred. I was asked by my practicum supervisor last autumn if I wanted to sit in on a counselling session with him. The session she had with him affected me more emotionally than any session I have ever experienced in my career as a psychologist. Paul's story epitomized for me the search, struggle, and resolution that I was embarking on as a gay man once married. Paul came out to embrace integrity, to be true to himself, whatever the cost. Even then, his courage and love struck me very, very deeply.

(adapted from journal entry, November 7, 1996).

November 15, 1996

I arrive at Paul's apartment to begin our interview. I enter, and I am immediately struck with awe. Three Christmas trees stand in the living room, arranged from lowest to highest, all beautifully decorated. The entire living room and attached dining room are fully regaled as well with Christmas decorations and colors. Combined with the snow clinging to the windows and the balcony door, the place looks like Santa's home. The only things missing are the reindeer. I wonder what all of this means?

(adapted from journal entry, November 15, 1996).

Paul's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *Loving yourself enough to accept yourself for who you really are and not letting other people influence you. Being able to live your life as a gay person with no regrets.*

Paul's Story:

I was born in Drumheller, but lived in a small coal-mining town for my first year and a half of life. Then we moved to various towns in British Columbia. I remained in British Columbia until I moved back to Alberta in 1976.

I knew there was something different about me since I was five or six years old. I was sexually attracted to boys from age five, and I was not attracted to girls. There was one boy that I often fantasized about. I didn't really know anything about sex, but the emotional side of it was there. I also wanted to get physically close to him.

I was eleven when I had my first sexual experience. It was wonderful. He was fifteen or sixteen, and we had oral sex and masturbated together. I continued to have sexual experiences with him and one other guy until I was sixteen or seventeen years old. I eventually closed the door on it because I internalized what society and people believed about it. I thought what I did was wrong. On the other hand, though, I wondered how my feelings toward males could be so wrong when they felt so right. It's really hard as a child to think that your feelings are wrong.

I believe that society's values really did a number on me. I was raised in the fifties and sixties, and being gay was considered unacceptable. It was something not talked about period. If you were gay or homosexual at that time, you were thought of as a pervert: you were this, you were that, and you should be locked up. The view was also that if you really wanted to, you could change. That made it much harder for me to come to terms with my own self. I was smart enough to keep quiet for fear of being locked up in an institution. I knew I didn't belong there.

I would be called everything at school. Society was not kind. I don't think anyone knew I was gay. I was not a jock because of medical reasons, even though I wanted to play baseball and other sports. That alienated me right there. The macho sports enthusiasts called anybody who was not in their realm a fag. According to them, a lot of kids must have been fags in those days!

I grew up with a lot of hate and animosity toward my father. I haven't talked to him in 27 years. He was always the type of person that you do as he tells you to do. I have a different attitude about that. Nobody tells Paul what to do. We didn't get along for that simple reason. He was a very abusive man physically. If my younger siblings did something wrong, he thought they learned it from me. He was a muscular man, 6' 3" tall and 225 pounds. By comparison, I am 6', 117 pounds.

Dad and mom weren't getting along so I left home when I was sixteen to escape from it. When I was 20, I came home one weekend to announce that I was getting married. My dad called me aside to tell me that he was seeing another woman. Mom wanted to know what was bothering me that night, and I finally broke down and told her. I told her she should leave him, but she said that she would lose everything if she just walked out. I said *"well, you don't have to walk out because you'll have grounds by this weekend to have him thrown out."* As promised, I got the grounds that weekend.

What did I do? I followed him, found out where he was going, and went back to get my mother. We went to the place and caught him literally with his pants down in the bedroom. There were about 70 other witnesses to top it all off . . . it was in a trailer court. There were more people around that trailer that night than Carter had pills. That was the end of their marriage. From that night forward I've never been afraid of my father, and I've probably only talked to him once since that night.

After moving away from home, I sought adventure. I wanted to see what else was out there and I did it. I accepted every opportunity to get transferred that came up in the company. I wanted new experiences and new challenges, and I went for it.

After age seventeen, I ceased having further sexual experiences with males until I was about 24 or 25. At age twenty, I did what society expected: I got married and had kids. She remains the only woman I was ever with sexually. I suppressed my feelings so bad that I was going to make my marriage work come hell or high water.

The biggest mistake anybody can make is to get married if they are homosexual, however. Eventually your feelings surface and they create more problems for you. Then you've got somebody else's life involved, and perhaps children as well. My same-sex feelings started emerging again as I could no longer suppress them. My marriage and everything else were also going downhill.

In October 1984 I decided that I could not continue living this way, but I still didn't want anyone to know the reason. The night that changed my whole life and made me accept myself was the night that I was planning suicide. I left no notes, no letters, no nothing so that no one would know it was suicide. After getting the car up to 160 miles per hour, I began driving it off the road when I heard a voice say, "*no, Paul, you have more to live for*." I changed my mind. I drove back on the road, and stopped my car.

I realized that I do have more to live for. Why should I end and destroy my life because of what society thinks? From that moment on I decided that I'm going to be who I am and I won't care what people think of me anymore. They can either be my friend or not, but it's going to be their gain or their loss and that became my attitude. I finally rid myself of the vicious stereotypes that I was raised with regarding gay people. It basically happened over night. By the time I came to that point I had already dealt with a lot of that shit and I was ready to be free.

Today I know my feelings are normal because they are my feelings. They are nobody else's feelings. Becoming able to accept my feelings helped me become much more positive toward my sexuality. Now I don't have a problem with who knows that I'm gay. If I tell somebody and they don't happen to like it, I say goodbye.

At that point I was also involved in a gay relationship with Tony, another married man. My relationship with him had started ten years earlier. My ex-wife had an affair two years after we were married. I was beginning to get over that and forgive her when she had a second one. That's when I met Tony.

I thought this clandestine relationship would work out well because both he and I were married. I justified it by believing that I was not cheating on her because it was not with another woman. There were times when I felt guilty, especially when I had to find a way to get away for a weekend with Tony. I don't like lying. I know today the whole affair was wrong. I made mistakes, I'll be the first one to admit it. I'm not proud of what I did, but its water under the bridge and there is nothing I can do to change it now.

Although he said that he loved me, I didn't believe him. At one point I thought I loved him, but I think my relationship with him was more out of convenience. After telling him I planned to leave my wife, he asked me to move to Vancouver. He planned on staying here, however. He would not leave his wife because of his child. I told him I would not settle for being second fiddle any longer. He made me a lot of promises, offered me a lot of money, and said I would never have to work again. I looked at him and said *"no, I'm not living that way. I've lived that way for too many years. I've lied to myself and lied to everybody around me for too many years already."*

Money was not what I needed. I needed the physical, the emotional being of that person with me. If I couldn't have that, I didn't want any of it. I didn't want a one, two, or three night-a-week stand. I would rather live by myself than live in a relationship like that. I ended my relationship with Tony in November 1984.

I also ended my marriage, which had already really ended because we hadn't slept together for quite a while. I moved out of the house in 1985. At one point I would say that I loved her, but I was never in love with her. I have had no contact with her for two years. We are not on good terms. When we divorced, I gave her the house, all the furnishings, everything. I signed everything over to her and walked away.

It was very difficult during the beginning of my transition, but I finally realized who I really was and that I loved myself enough to accept myself. That's when I knew everything would become easier. When I made the break, I made the break. In July 1985, I got all three of my kids together and told them all at once.

They looked at me and said, *"well is that all you had to tell us, dad?"* I said *"well, ya,"* and they looked at me and said, *"well then can we go out and spend the day together?"* I'm thinking to myself, *"what's wrong with this picture?"* They were a lot more accepting then I expected. That had been my one concern because they meant a lot to me. I moved on to telling the rest of the family and got basically what I figured I would get from them.

My one brother, a Jehovah Witness, said *"that's not the way God wants things. You're nothing but this, that, and everything else."* I said, *"well there is only one problem, John. That's what you are too and you're only hiding behind your religion with it."* He replied that he is cured, and I told him there is no cure for this. We haven't talked in over 11 years now.

Fred, my other brother, and I had our differences because he's a real redneck. At one point most of my family started believing a lot of lies promulgated by my ex-wife. When my eldest son got married, for example, Fred said *"you know, Paul, the only thing that I can't understand is why you didn't want your children."* I said *"hold it here a minute, I never have said I did not want my children. I know where that's come from. If I didn't want my children, why am I putting on a wedding, why do I have my daughter living with me, and why is my other son moving in with me? Does that sound like somebody that doesn't want their children?"*

We had a talk there and that was that. I never heard from him again until summer 1995 when my daughter got married. Fred called me and told me that he decided I am still his brother, and although he may not agree with my lifestyle, who is he to judge it. He and I are still basically talking, but it's never going to be that true brotherly relationship that we once had.

I think my sister Charlene wants to accept me, but I think she is being pressured by my mother not to. Whatever she decides is fine with me.

My youngest son is also gay too. When my daughter got married, my son and I went to see my mom because she was unable to attend the wedding. We had a big fight because she felt she had a son, not a "daughter," and a grandson, not a "granddaughter." That was her mentality. I felt very disappointed in her at that moment.

Later that day I met with Charlene and told her *"I love myself enough to walk away from it all today and not let it bother me. I have my partner and I have my children. If the rest of you don't want to be in my life, that's your decision. I am not giving up my life for you. I love myself enough to be who I really am. I thought that is what everybody wants out of life: for their family and loved ones to be honest with each other."*

The only discrimination that I recall experiencing is having lost a job because they found out I was gay. It was done in a very subtle and quiet way. I just chalked that up to small minds. I don't have time for that in my life.

Over the past 11 years, my life has been wonderful, other than some family bullshit. From the time I met Roger, I couldn't have asked for a better life. When I met him, I had no intentions of ever having another relationship, none whatsoever. I did not want one. I met him on June 18, 1985, and on July 1, we started living together. That's the way it happened. We had talked about it prior to that, but I kept saying *"no, I'm not doing it."* Our feelings were just too strong, however, so we decided to take a chance with each other.

Meeting Roger was like meeting someone I had known all my life. There were fireworks. The connection between us was incredible. I didn't know I had the kind of feelings within me that I felt for him. I was in shock the first night I went to his place. He had some of the same furniture in his bedroom that I had in mine. I wondered what the hell is going on here? When I left that night, I cried all the way home. I knew that night that I was falling in love with him.

I wouldn't trade him for all the tea in China. There is no way. Our relationship is the best thing that ever happened to me. I've talked to my kids about it and I asked them, *"would you have rather seen mom and I stay together?"* They both said *"no."* Then I asked *"would you rather see me with a woman?,"* and they said *"no, dad. We have never seen you so happy."* My kids have all accepted Roger. As far as they're concerned, he is their stepfather. What more would I want out of life? I already have everything I value.

Roger never married. He has been gay all his adult life. He assumed that in a gay relationship, you need to put up with a lot of crap. We have had our differences like in any relationship, gay or straight. However, I told him that there is no difference between a gay relationship and a straight relationship. We all face the same problems. You have to work at it if you want it to work. You have to be able to communicate with one another, talk things out, and go forward from there. The only difference is that gay people have to worry about society and what they think about us. I told him that I could care less what they think about me.

I am in a relationship and I'm quite happy where I'm at. If you can't accept that, that's not my problem anymore. There are no games with me. The biggest thing to me about positive gay identity is accepting yourself and loving yourself. You're never going to find happiness in a relationship unless you do love yourself because you have to know what love is before you can give it.

On August 2, 1986, Roger and I experienced a holy union ceremony together at the chapel on the university campus. In other words, we got married. We had a professional photographer and the reception was back at our place. We had a three-tiered wedding cake and everything. I had asked Roger if he would marry me and he said yes. I felt that I really wanted to make a total commitment to him, and he wanted to as well. It was an absolutely wonderful day. There were 50 people present, half gay and half straight.

Roger was tested for the HIV virus in July 1986. He pre-warned me that if the results came back positive, I would have to leave. I just looked at him and said *"pardon me. I'm going to tell you this right now -- there is no way in this world that I would ever leave you over this. If you decided to run, I would take every penny I ever made to find you."*

Unfortunately, the results came back positive. I was myself diagnosed as HIV positive in October 1987. He blamed himself for giving me the virus. I said *"nobody knows where we got it from. I don't know it and you don't know it."* At first Roger thought he would be dead in six months. I decided that there was no possible way that I would be negative about Roger's HIV status. We had not practiced safer sex because back in 1985, safer sex was not yet a big issue. It was still the beginning of HIV awareness. On our tenth anniversary, I said *"well Roger, it's been a long six months, hasn't it?"*

What matters to me is dealing with this and making the best of my life. There is no point dwelling on the fact that I am HIV positive and that I'm going to die. My theory is that you are born to die, and each day you have is one day less. Nonetheless, my HIV status does not mean I'm dying.

I've been more conscious of living since 1971 when I almost did die. I think there is too much emphasis put on where I got the virus. I don't really give a shit because I think whatever the good Lord wants me to die from is what I'm going to die from. There is a reason for it.

My physician at times had a hard time dealing with me because I was so nonchalant. She said, *"Paul, you don't seem to be upset?"* I replied, *"what is there to be upset about? I was dying yesterday. Just because I'm HIV positive doesn't mean I'm going to die from AIDS. I could walk out of here today, get hit by a bus, or fall down the stairs and break my neck and die!"* Does that mean I died from AIDS? No it does not.

I don't believe that HIV is something that just sprung up in 1984. What is AIDS? It's pneumonia and quick cancer for most people. Well, pneumonias and cancers have been around for how many years?

To date I have not had any symptoms, other than my T4 count[20] has gone down. But you know what? It's only a number, that's all it is. I'm a very positive type of person. I do not believe in sitting around and dwelling on the challenges I face. It doesn't make matters better for you. It only makes things worse for you because you pull yourself down emotionally.

Regarding my own growth as a gay person, I've fully arrived at where I'm at with who I am. I would like the uneducated to realize that we are not child molesters or perverts. Some are, but they exist in every walk of life. We're no different than anyone else. I have found happiness, but it's all because I found happiness within myself and learned to love myself.

May 14, 1997

I'm having coffee with the psychologist I mentioned earlier. My body chills as she tells me Paul died suddenly and unexpectedly on Saturday, May 10. At his request, there will be no memorial.

I am struck with sadness. Paul had become my role model, and I miss him more than anyone should after such a short exchange. I knew him for four hours. As I'm sure Roger would attest, however: he was easy to love.

(adapted from journal entry, May 14, 1996).

CO-RESEARCHER #11: *"JOHN"*

Present Occupation: Lawyer

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
62	14	7

Recollections, August 2, 1997

I attended a party last August in Calgary and met a number of very positive gay men. Most of these people were very successful in life as well. John was one such person. As he was a bit older than my other co-researchers to date, I wondered if he might provide some rare insights into the gay experience. I interviewed him on November 24, 1996.

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[20] The T4 count is one measure of the body's ability to fight infection.

John's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *The description which applies to a gay male who is comfortable with his sexual orientation.*

John's Story:

At age seven, I distinctly remember the first time my father took me on a holiday with him. We were on a train and we slept in the same berth. I remember feeling enthralled with becoming entwined in my father's legs. I think that is my first memory of being attracted to males. I don't think I paid any attention to his penis, but rather I just remember it was the feeling of being close to this nice male person who happened to be my father.

My father was a successful businessman and he was also a very highly decorated soldier in two World Wars. My family was quite socially prominent in Calgary. My mother was very socially conscious. Both of my parents thought it was very important to be well connected. I could see some things that I just didn't like about that lifestyle. From observing guests, I concluded that some people in our social strata were unauthentic. While one side of me wanted to be successful and prominent like my parents, the other side of me was developing an understanding of how phoney some people were in terms of real feelings on subjects and real commitment to society. However, I never failed to respect my father for his deep sense of duty and loyalty to his country, and in those years, to the Crown.

During my early teenage years is when I became very aware that I was not developing the same attitude toward the opposite sex as most of my friends. I also became very conscious of my attraction to males. I dealt with that in general by suppressing it and leading a straight and conventional lifestyle. At that time, I was in one of Canada's most established boarding school for boys. I participated in many sports activities and school activities and became one of the leading boys in the school. That also tended to keep me on the straight and narrow.

Nonetheless, I did have some sexual encounters during those teenage years which I found pleasurable. I can remember feeling huge pangs of guilt in high school soon after having an orgasm with another guy.

I first fell in love with a heterosexual friend of mine when I was in grade ten. I did everything possible to be with him: I did everything he did and liked everything he liked. That lasted all through high school and beyond. At that time, I didn't understand why I had these feelings. I tried to suppress them, but they continued for many years.

I went on to university and joined a fraternity. It became apparent to me that one of the young alumni in the fraternity paid a lot of attention to me. At first I found it flattering and I enjoyed this person's company. However, at the end of my second year of university, I went on a trip with him to the United States and something turned me off about him. He came onto me in a way which left me feeling that I couldn't handle it. I decided then and there that I did not want to continue any kind of physical relationship with him. I clearly remember that I was going to do my best to shut down those feelings, and I did. It was at least ten years later when I started feeling that I was really being deprived or depriving myself of my whole being . . . my real sexuality.

I think mostly what kept me in the closet was that I wanted to become a productive, successful member of society. I wanted to finish my law degree and practice in an established firm in Calgary. It was also because of social standing.

I decided I would get married. I met a girl at university from much the same background as myself a few months after my American trip. I had known of her before. We had attended the same Protestant church and her father was a well-known professional in Calgary. I certainly enjoyed her company and thought that she was really nice and lots of fun. I ceased to have any sexual connection with any other male. We had a very happy marriage in the earlier years, but on the sexual side, I realized I was not fulfilled at all. I was going through an exercise whenever my wife and I had sex. It was almost meaningless for me.

As I entered my late 30's, I began to feel that I was missing something that everybody else was enjoying. I began to really question whether or not I should remain married. Those feelings became stronger, which I think were exacerbated by the fact that gay people were starting to be accepted and talked about in a positive way. In the late 70's, there was definitely a growing acceptance of gay people, especially amongst the more educated. Ten or fifteen years prior to that, the subject was simply not discussed.

I was not in love with her the way I subsequently fell in love with a male. That happened to me about 15 years after we were married. I met a person by accident and I fell totally in love with him. Having that to compare to, I was never in love with my wife to that degree. When I fell in love with him, I didn't ever want to be away from him.

He was very respectful of the fact that I was married and had children, so it wasn't that I saw him three times a week or anything like that. We went hiking together, sometimes accompanied by my son. My wife got to know him a little and I think she rather liked him. This relationship was the catalyst that helped me to come out to myself. I let myself be really what I am. Unfortunately, he died in a canoe accident about two years after I met him. This totally devastated me. My wife even came to the funeral with me, and she was actually very supportive. She was also not aware that we were having any kind of a relationship, but she later put it together.

Although I developed a feeling that I could cope on my own, I didn't really know what to expect in my law firm. I was then a partner in a very conservative and established practice in Calgary. By this time, my wife had become suspicious that I was gay and she had gone independently and secretly for counselling and finally persuaded me to come with her.

The psychiatrist told my wife that he thought I was dedicated to her and that I actually loved her but that if she wanted the marriage to survive, she would have to recognize that I would need to have a more open relationship. She rejected that. I was surprised that in the final interview we had with the psychiatrist, he almost scolded her. He was a very positive reinforcement to me, which I didn't expect.

We separated around six months later. I literally walked out of the house on a summer day in the late 1970s. The children at that time were ages eleven, fourteen, and sixteen: Kathy, Gordon, and Susan, respectively. I was 43 years old. We had stayed married for 19 years.

Separating from my wife was very difficult. I had many mixed feelings. I was very sad to leave the children, but also a huge burden had been lifted from my shoulders. Prior to separating, it had reached the point that every single night when I came home from work, I would be subject to the same harangue about when was I leaving and it was also having an effect on the children. I was also afraid that I would be rejected by all of my straight friends and my partners. That simply didn't happen. I continued to be respected and cared for by a number of my straight friends, both male and female. I did lose a few friends, however, but they were all people who were not particularly close to me.

I bought my own house and we commenced separation negotiations. It became a very acrimonious relationship. The longer I was away from her the more bitter she became. We had very little contact. The only times that she ever called was when she wanted to tell me how much the children hated me. It backfired. We lost all contact with each other, but I had no problem continuing to have a good relationship with my children. I made a point of having them over at least once a week. They all did well in school and eventually attended and graduated from university.

A few months after our separation, I was visited by a senior partner in the firm who told me I had a number of options. He said that he had heard I was a homosexual. I told him that he was correct. He said that he didn't know anything about it and asked to be informed. I remember saying to him that the gay world is the complete mirror image of straight society. There are many people who are gay who are very decent, principled, disciplined, productive, loving, caring, creative people. There are a number who are bums and there are a mass of people in the middle. I said it's very much like the straight society.

This partner was very interested and he seemed nonjudgemental. He said to me *"look, I'm here on behalf of a number of partners who need to make a decision on your future within the firm. My sense is that you probably don't have anything to worry about."* I told him *"I intend to remain a hard working partner within the firm and maintain my involvement in the community as I have in the past. You will always find that I am a well-behaved partner."* He left on very good terms and told me that if I didn't hear anything in the next couple of weeks, just carry on. That was about 20 years ago.

I felt honored that they recognized me as a decent person and that I hadn't radically changed. He said to me that *"you're the same person you were two years ago or five years ago."* That was a very positive reinforcement for me.

I went to see a counsellor on the advice of a friend on the point of dealing with the children, as they would ask a lot of questions eventually. The psychologist said to me *"John, you should feel good about yourself and what you've done with your life."* I got very good vibes from the conversations that I had with him. He said the only word of advice I would give you is never lie to your children and leave the door open for them. It turned out that none of the children ever came to me and asked me any questions. They pieced it together on their own.

I was not able to come out to my father before he passed away, but I did come out to my mother before her death. She was wonderful. Although she could be very snobbish, she really was a very elegant lady. When I told her, she was amazingly accepting, I think partly because she always loved me and she was very proud of me. I also think my father would have been accepting, although disappointed. Unlike my mother, my father was not snobbish at all. He felt that we can all learn from everybody and some people are more privileged in life than others. He never looked down on people who were less privileged.

In any event, I guess I've answered the question initially as to how I embarked on this journey toward being a positive gay person and feeling very positive about myself. First, I established a very good relationship with my children and second, I was able to carry on within my profession in a very positive way. My profession led me into some very positive appointments to various committees and boards and so forth where it was known that I was a gay person.

I have been involved with a federal political party over the last 30 years. An earlier prime minister knew that I was gay and he was well aware of my accomplishments. At the time, I had undertaken some major responsibilities for this party. He let me know that I had a place in the party. He had a positive attitude toward gay people.

At a small dinner party for a number of high ranking party members, I took the opportunity to say that I was very proud to be a member of this political party, one reason being that I felt it is an inclusive party, rather than an exclusive party. I went on to say that I was one of those people in the invisible minority who felt comfortable within the party. I received a standing ovation for my comments and the leader of the party came over and shook my hand. It was a very positive experience.

I don't want to give you the impression that being gay has been easy, however. I was physically attacked about fifteen years ago one night when I was walking on a beautiful summer evening with a friend. We had white pants on and very nice colourful shirts. I think he had his hand over my shoulder or something and we decided to walk to the gay bar. Three drunken bums attacked us and beat us up severely.

I was on the ground and bleeding when some people came along and put an end to the attack. I went directly down to the police station and the police were very sympathetic. Several days later the police contacted me and said *"we have found the people who attacked you, but why didn't you tell us you were gay?"*

Apparently these assailants claimed that we had attacked them, and they were going to lay charges against us if we pursued this. In court, it would be a question of whom the judge would believe. Keep in mind that these guys were absolute bums. Nevertheless, because we were gay, we were second-class citizens in the eyes of the police. Consequently, they were not interested in prosecuting the thing at all.

I do not regret the fact that I was once married and had children. One of the reasons for my positive feelings about being gay is because of my increasingly close relations with my children. The older they have grown the closer we have become. The incredible endorsement by my children has been a major factor for me.

Another reason I do not regret my marriage is that I met some very nice people through my wife, including her own family. Her sister has been incredibly nice to me since the marriage breakup. I could always talk to her when I couldn't talk to my wife. She has been absolutely fabulous.

The only continuing unhappiness for me in my firm has been with one partner who became the managing partner. I felt he was totally homophobic. Once he took over, I noticed that I was getting no new work from him. Any major new work that came into the firm went to a partner who was junior to me by 15 years. On a comparative performance basis, eventually you don't look as good. That's really the only negative thing that has happened at my firm. I intend to retire in two years, and I will soon be discussing my retirement plan with some of my partners.

I have been in a relationship with Aziz for twelve years in Canada, after initially meeting him in Egypt 15 years ago. We have developed a very positive gay relationship. If I could take a needle today that would make me straight tomorrow, I don't think I would take it at this point in my life. If I were 23 and starting to article again at my law firm, I might.

The one thing I still need to do in order to continue my development as a gay man involves educating straight people. I have seriously thought about writing an autobiography. My children have encouraged me to do it. It would be either a short story or a book on what it's like to be gay in North America: what we've had to put up with, what we have achieved, what we have come through, and where we're at now. I want to educate straight people that we, as gay people, are very much like they are, have much the same set of values in many areas, and that we are part of the same world in which they grew up.

One topic we have not discussed is the subject of sexual behavior. I went to a play recently which had certain scenes which suggested that gay men were having sex in a park. It's not that I'm in anyway judgemental, but having this seedy scene in the play was embarrassing to me. Some of my straight friends had accompanied me to the play and felt the same way.

One type of gay person that I do not like are those who make outrageous public statements and who behave in an attention seeking manner in public. I would find it equally distasteful to see a heterosexual female flaunting herself in a very unbecoming manner. I do not respect people who are totally irresponsible.

I believe that I am a good example of a gay individual who has been able to succeed, despite the odds. I have come a long way from when I married and rejected one side of myself to where I am today. I see myself as a positive example to younger gay people that they can get on with their lives and make all kinds of contributions in many areas and spheres of life, whether it's becoming chair of the United Way or a local AIDS organization, or whether it's becoming a priest in a church. I think those kinds of gay people are to be respected.

CO-RESEARCHER #12: *"DAVID"*

Present Occupation: Junior High School Student

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
15	13	8

Recollections, August 5, 1997

By this time in my search for appropriate co-researchers, I decided that I needed to have some younger gay men. Is it easier now for young people to come out and develop a positive gay identity as compared to what the older men in my study have experienced?

I contacted a student from the University of Alberta whom I knew was involved with a gay youth group in Edmonton. He suggested that I approach David, a fifteen-year-old gay youth. Although he was younger than I initially planned on including in my research, I was impressed that his article on the problems of gay youth was published in the local gay newspaper.

November 29, 1996

I climb the stairs to his home and knock on the door. His mother welcomes me while David remains seated. He is a person with cerebral palsy, and his ability to walk is impaired. His mother, Clara, told me that he wasn't supposed to walk at all, or talk. Well, surprise! David walks, talks, and writes.

As I ready myself to begin, Clara joins us and offers some of her reflections. She suspected that David was gay since he was five years old. She said that he was an effeminate boy who was quite sensitive: he liked nail polish and the arts. Whenever she took him to the San Francisco store, he would always seek out the male calendars. She brought him up with the philosophy that "you are who you are." She blames the negative images in the media for keeping him in the *closet until age thirteen. She sighs that in 1996, David cannot walk hand-in-hand with another male if he wants, and he can't go to a school dance with a male date.*

I am discovering that David is a remarkable young person. So is his mom. She is the mom all gay men would dream of having: loving, supportive, accepting, and good-natured. She completely supports her son as a gay youth. I thank God for people like Clara.
(adapted from journal entry, November 29, 1996).

David's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *I think a positive gay identity is that in which I can feel comfortable about myself and who I am.*

David's Story:

My parents have been divorced since I was two-years old. I used to see my father every Sunday until about four years ago. I never enjoyed these visits. He wouldn't do much with me, and when he did, it felt obligatory. Consequently, I never became very close to him. I haven't had any contact with him since I was nine.

A couple of years before that, I had actually confronted my father and said you aren't being a really good dad to me. He responded with *"well, okay, if you want to see me, you call me."* For the first while I called him, but whenever I did, he was always busy. He made no effort to see me. Finally I gave up. He already had. That has affected me in a big way. It hurts when I see other families with a mother and father.

I have had cerebral palsy since I was a baby. That is why my fine motor skills are impaired. Besides cerebral palsy, I also have obsessive-compulsive disorder. I sometimes check the lock on the door repetitively and I worry excessively about my health and other things that have no foundation. I have been home from school recently for two weeks because of my anxiety.

When I was around four years old, I remember asking my mother *"do men ever marry?"* She replied *"they do if things are right for them."* That was probably my first inkling of being gay. As I grew older, I thought about it more.

Around age six, I used to go to the swimming pool with my father. I remember being very attracted to men in the change rooms. That also gave me the idea that maybe I'm different.

My dad would always say *"whatcha looking at?"* I couldn't answer because I was so embarrassed.

One memory from age eight really sticks out in my mind. I had a friend that I really liked and we spent a lot of time together. I actually told him that I loved him, and he responded back to me similarly. Later I found out that he was the school bully. He apparently wasn't nice to most of our peers, but he was to me. I feel that was the beginning for me of my gay awareness.

I thought about it for the next few years but I didn't really want to say anything about it. I was very afraid of it. I'm already physically challenged and I thought I didn't need the extra complication of also being gay. Gay is just another thing on top of that and I'm not going to be gay.

I kept refusing to think about it until I was around thirteen. I decided to approach my school counsellor and I told her that I thought I was gay. She gave me some information on a youth group in Edmonton and I went to the centre once and met some people. I became really uncomfortable with it after that and decided not to go back for a year-and-a-half.

I came out to myself when I was thirteen. I don't' know how I came to that point, but I guess I was having a hard time pushing down my feelings and attractions. It was really getting to me. I decided it might be okay to allow myself to be who I am and stop pretending to be someone I wasn't. I kept vacillating, though, until I eventually decided that I have to accept this. It's there and it's just going to make me feel worse if I keep denying it.

I don't think I ever had negative impressions, or stereotypes, of gay people to overcome. I was just afraid that if I'm gay, it will be much harder for me because I thought people are going to hate me. In actuality, a few of my friends have found out that I am gay and they're very positive about it.

I did wonder if being gay was morally wrong, however. What changed my view of that was meeting some gay people, and I also did more thinking about it. I had to accept who I was, like it or not.

One of my friends at school is a lesbian and we do many of the same things together. She goes to the gay choir, I go to the choir. She goes to the gay youth group, I go to the youth group. I also wrote the article about gay youth that was recently published. I've become more comfortable being out in the community. Initially I found it frightening to become more visible.

Being out in community events has really shown me that it is wonderful to be gay. Something I've noticed about gay people is that they're very warm and affectionate.

Last year at school there was a girl, Tina, who really wanted to be my girlfriend. As time went on, she increasingly wanted to become intimate. I was horrified. I've never had sexual attraction for a female. I kept telling her that we would never become boyfriend and girlfriend, but it never sufficed. I decided that I would need to come out to her. I began by saying *"you know, I don't like girls as most boys do."* She replied *"well I'll train you."* I don't think she quite understood so I finally whispered in her ear *"I'm gay."* Her eyes popped out and then she stared at me for a minute expressionless. She looked really uncomfortable and agitated for the rest of the day. She has never really accepted that I can't be her boyfriend. She still wants to cling to me even now. Whatever I do I cannot get away from her.

I asked Tina specifically not to tell her parents yet, and she ended up telling her parents that evening. I don't want anyone else to know unless I tell them myself. Lately, however, I have been talking about gay topics at school. My friends respond very well to these discussions. They're quite positive and they think it's really interesting. Tina said to me the other day, *"don't you think you're making yourself obvious?"* I said *"maybe I am, but if they find out they find out."* It will be a gradual thing. I think I want them to know. It's very hard not being able to express yourself fully.

You asked me what it would be like to be out in junior high school in 1996. I don't know for sure, but I think it depends on what school you go to definitely. In my school particularly, I don't know if I would feel completely comfortable because our school is very ethnic. Many of the students have grown up with religions that would not accept gay people. I still think it would be difficult.

I'm also the only one with a physical disability in my school. If I ever come out at school, everybody will know it's not the purple walker that I've come out of. Remaining closeted at school is not easy either. I can sit at a school dance and think, *"gee, wouldn't it be nice to enjoy some slow dancing with that guy over there."* I can't, however, because it's still considered unacceptable. I hate the unfairness of this. It makes me very depressed. It makes me feel as if I am someone who is not allowed to express myself honestly to others.

I have a university friend who I was thinking of coming out to for a long time. I sat down, fully expecting that I might be totally rejected, or at least hearing an *"oh my God, you're* *gay!"* I kind of stammered and said *"well, you know, I'm gay."* He looked at me and said *"so? That's okay, that's fine."* I thought *"that's it? Nothing more than so?"*

My lesbian friend is out at our school and although she admits that she hears the odd harassing comment, she shoots it right back at them. She is very forthright and very outgoing. I am more of a quiet person.

Recently, I have developed feelings for a guy named Greg whom I met at the youth group. A relationship would be impossible because of our age difference . . . he is twenty. By my standards it would be completely wrong. I don't think I would date anyone older than seventeen right now, and this poses a problem as most people in my age bracket are not visible . . . they aren't out yet. Consequently, it's really hard to find someone my own age, particularly someone like Greg who also enjoys similar interests in the arts and drama.

Although I'd like to be interested in somebody right now, my feelings toward Greg have caused me a lot of upset. For whatever reason, he is unable to even be a friend. If I call him, he doesn't return phone calls and things like that. He's a really nice person but he's just not together enough.

I have often wished that the youth group I attend would advertise more. It's always the same people who attend. Perhaps I'm looking for something that's too idealistic, but I don't think so. I think it's terrible that gay youth have a very high suicide rate. I think that shows that there really isn't anything for youth. If there were, I think there would be fewer suicides.

Although I am still a virgin, I think about sex quite a bit. I eventually want to have sex with the right person. I am a person who likes to be very committed to somebody and deeply involved, whether it's a friendship or a relationship. I like friends who know me deeply. I think I will eventually fall in love with a man who is as sensitive as I am and someone who really cares about who they are.

I think that having casual sex with different people might be kind of interesting, but you need to think about your life. With HIV and AIDS out there, it might be quite dangerous. Besides the danger, I've also wondered if perhaps the emotional attachment isn't there if you have casual sex. It can cause big problems too if you really like that person but they don't like you that much. Then you go your separate ways and you're still wanting this person. That's what I don't think I would like about casual sex. I think you should be more involved and more committed to each other before you start having intimate sexual relations.

I've often felt that marriages for gay couples should be permitted. I believe that this would provide a sense of having greater equality with the straight community, but it would also provide a sense of closure within a relationship. You wouldn't always have to consider your partner to be merely your boyfriend.

In order to continue my development as a gay male, I need to make more gay friends and acquaintances, and get involved in more community activities . . . those that I can because of my age. It's difficult because a lot of them are for older individuals and they either don't allow younger people to get involved or they just aren't something that would interest me. I will get involved in whatever I can in the community that is applicable to me. It would also be nice if I wasn't as sensitive to criticism. It bothers me when other people make cruel jokes, for example, about gay people. I want to believe that that's okay, this is who I am, so that's their problem.

I still feel a little strange with the behavior of some gay people. Sometimes they are too crass. That really shocks me. I'll be standing there thinking *"how could you say that?"* I'm still a little uncomfortable with some of the activities in the gay community as well, but I'm really getting to see the positive side of who we are.

I think my acceptance will grow as I continue to become more comfortable with myself. I'm sure I have a lot of growing to do yet. I used to think *"oh my God, I'm gay, I don't want to be gay."* Now the thought of being straight seems so boring to me.

My hope is that society will become more accepting of gay people in general, and that they'll be taught that we aren't monsters or aliens. I also hope that young people will become educated about gays while they're still most impressionable about those types of things. I believe it should begin in grade five as part of sex education.

November 29, 1996

Soon after I leave, the flood of tears begin. I should be used to it by now, but they still surprise me. David has a host of special challenges, yet he is self-assured. I am feeling touched by his story.. I feel strangely naked, stripped of pride and any pretense so easy to muster unwittingly. I only wish I had had the balls at his age to face the depth of my feelings for other males.

I hope that a by product of my dissertation will be about helping gay people to look deeply at who they are. I've learned that the mirror doesn't give us back a perfect reflection . . . but it is, nonetheless, our own.

(adapted from journal entry, November 29, 1996).

CO-RESEARCHER #13: *"GLENN"*

Present Occupation: Resource Administrative Assistant

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
47	32-or-33	late 20's?

Recollections, August 12, 1997

"Glenn" is the first gay friend that I met after moving to Edmonton in August 1995. As our friendship grew, I came to value his advice on more than one occasion. He helped me learn to accept the diversity within our community more than anyone. Besides having developed a positive gay identity, Glenn belongs to one of the subcultures that is often misunderstood, both within and outside the gay community: He is a leatherman.

What does it mean to be a leatherman? How does a leatherman construct a positive gay identity? I interviewed Glenn on November 30, 1996.

Glenn's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *A positive gay identity means that one's sexual orientation has integrated itself as part of the whole being, no more or no less important than every other aspect of that which is "me."*

Glenn's Story:

I refer to myself as gay, and I use this term to signify that I have completed a very long, arduous, and painful journey of acceptance. My adoption of a positive gay identity began with coming out to myself. I remember that the admission of being gay was something very difficult for me. It took place over a number of years. During this time I had a sign taped to the inside of my apartment door that said *"I'm great, God doesn't make junk."* Reading that repeatedly was motivational. It reminded me that I didn't need to feel any less worthy because of my sexual orientation: I always felt I was basically a very good person. Disclosing to others was generally very positive. The feedback from my friends and family was that being gay had nothing to do with the type of person I was.

What I managed to do throughout it all was simply remain myself. I maintained my relationship with my family and friends that I've had since early teens and we remain on very good terms. These people were obviously looking at me as a complete person and viewing me as a human being. I'm certainly not a perfect person but they stood by me throughout all of this and it felt good that I still had their respect. I feel that I earned it simply by being myself. I have always been proud of being just me: I am unique and at the same time part of the grand scheme of things. I have my place, I fit in, and that is essentially it.

I was not aware that I was different in my childhood years. I played with boys and girls equally: I know I felt an attraction toward females in my mid-to-late teens which continued until my mid-twenties. To my recollection, I was not conscious then of being attracted to males. When I was in that age bracket, I didn't like the way I looked so when I did notice another guy, I thought about having his hair, clothes, face, or body. There was really nothing overtly sexual about it.

My family moved when I was fifteen and I found myself in a high school where I knew nobody. That changed after I became involved with a large circle of friends from the church youth group. My social life was very active with this group throughout high school and university. We did everything together. If any of us were sexually active, we never talked about it. I suspect that by and large we were not.

Growing up in Edmonton, I didn't realize that there were options available. I did not know there was such a thing as homosexuality. Call it naivete. I was slow in developing sexual interest and awareness. I never even masturbated seriously until I was 20 or 21, and I do not remember entertaining sexual fantasies. I was simply pleasing myself. Sexual matters were "hush-hush" throughout society and sex was something that was never discussed at either home or school.

I began university in 1968 to pursue a bachelor of arts in romance languages. I'm very much in my own way a very quiet rebel and by the time the seventies rolled around, drugs and free love were everywhere. I basically said *"well, that's really not for me."* I made my own choices, and that was not a scene that I wanted. Sex was not a big deal to me either. I suppose I could take it or leave it and I think I was stuck in that mode where you saved yourself for somebody very special whom you would eventually marry.

I went to England in 1975 at the age of 26. English men generally paid more attention to their grooming and their dress than Edmontonians. For the first time I really started looking at men. Something clicked inside me that I could be exactly who I wanted to be and what I wanted to be in England. With money to burn, I could do just about anything that I wanted. It was a very liberating experience for me. There were none of the restraints and restrictions that I faced at home.

Nonetheless, I never really thought much about it at the time. I know that I felt good about myself when I returned home. My body image problem was resolved and I really liked myself. I wasn't really aware of any big change, but my friends and family were. My sister had asked my mother: *"What's happened to Glenn? He's a whole new person!"*

Visiting England became an annual event. My third trip was in 1977, and this is when I became aware of having homosexual inclinations. I stayed with Brian, a heterosexual friend of mine from Edmonton who was doing his Ph.D. in London. He enjoyed walking at night; it was his thinking time. One night we went out for a walk through Holland Park. I was surprised by all of the men there at one or two in the morning. Years later I discovered that it was at that time one of London's most popular and notorious outdoor cruising areas.

Brian kidded with me by saying *"don't worry, they're all fags."* I chuckled, but call it what you will: a sort of animal instinct started stirring within me. Although I found this frightening, I was being drawn to it. I wondered if maybe I belonged there, in Holland Park, at night. A seed was germinating because I was still relatively ignorant about homosexuality.

Following this night I did a lot of thinking about it. I visited some dirty book shops and perused magazines of men. The dirty book scene in England has magazines for every taste: heterosexual, homosexual, you name it . . . every kink. Some of it is really far out and bizarre. I found it very exciting. That was the first time that I'd ever found publications like that because Edmonton was still in the backwoods.

I took the night ferry to France a few days later. I sat alone in a compartment until two men accompanied me. The younger American one told me that he was an actor and he said *"you don't mind if I change my shirt, do you? I've been in this all day."* He took great pains to change his shirt in front of me: very, very slowly, in an exhibitionistic way. I'm sure I was supposed to take notice of all this. I did, but it didn't do anything for me. I suspect this guy was gay and he had an eye for me.

Nonetheless, I put these developing interests on the back burner and returned to Edmonton in mid July. In August, I began frequenting a park which was known as a place where men gathered. Whether or not there was sex going on, I don't know. I would very often go down to that park and sunbathe to get a glimpse. I was curious. Nothing happened as a result of that.

In 1978, I was again in France. I walked by the side of the Seine in Paris one sunny afternoon where a bunch of men where sunbathing, clad only in undershorts and lying on towels. I joined them. I never thought anything of it, and only recently did I discover that this area near the Orangerie is one of Paris' biggest cruising areas and has been since the sixteenth or seventeenth century.

In Edmonton in the spring of 1979, I met a young woman, Sharon. She was gorgeous with beautiful hair and eyes, a lovely figure, and an exceptionally lovely personality. Although I was exceptionally attracted to her, I was unable to take the relationship beyond the level of a very good friendship. I didn't understand why.

Toward the end of the summer, she went to Manitoba and reconnected with an old boyfriend. They became engaged, and I was devastated. I went off to England a few weeks later and it started gelling in my mind that something is not right here. I was very angry actually that I had let this wonderful woman get away from me. I was also angry that I had remained celibate for so many years. I kept thinking that this was really a crock of shit. I decided it was time to reexamine my outlook on life and my philosophy toward sex and marriage.

I decided soon after that it was time to get my fair share of sex, and I didn't really care whether it would be with a man or a woman. That's when I started to deal with the gay issue. During my next trip to England in 1981, I went to a gay bar for the first time. A great surge of attraction to men was exploding concurrently with an attraction to fetishes and leather sex. These issues were starting to bubble around in an overwhelming pot.

In 1980, I actually picked somebody up in the Legislature grounds one day. I'd been cruising him for a number of weeks and I went back to his apartment. We didn't have sex, but I really enjoyed the physical closeness, the touching, and the affection. It scared me as I was still walking the tightrope as to which way I was going to fall. It got shoved to the background because I wasn't ready. Things happen when they're ready to happen and if we sum up my life story, that's exactly what occurred. Things happened for me when the time was right.

I found 1981 through 1983 to be the most difficult time of my life. I experienced a lot of inward thinking and soul searching. I was trying to come to grips with my sexual orientation and the way that I wanted to express myself sexually. I think what I really needed at that time was human companionship with others who have similar sexual interests. Unfortunately, Edmonton was still fairly backwards at that time. I was very lonely.

I was dealing with a lot of stereotypes. For example, I believed one's homosexuality was something that you kept secret and expressed after dark. It was something that wasn't really socially acceptable. It was especially difficult in our society then to develop a positive gay identity. Dealing with the leather aspect also made me wonder if I was a monster. I thought I would never find fulfilment because I thought I was the only one with similar interests. It was a sad, tragic, and difficult time for me.

Prior to my 1983 trip to Britain, I admitted to myself that I was gay. I was alone in bed one night and I started to cry. I cried an awful lot when I woke up the next morning, I said to myself *"yes, I'm gay,"* but at first it seemed like nothing had really changed. The garbage hadn't been emptied, the bills hadn't been paid, the place looked like a mess, and the laundry hadn't been done. Before leaving my apartment that day, however, I looked at the sign on the door that said *"I'm great, God doesn't make junk."* What had changed was this: I felt happy. I was beginning to overcome a major hurdle.

I later left for Britain with the objective of thinking about things and sorting myself out. I found myself being very introspective on this trip. At two o'clock in the morning while heading home to my hotel, an inebriated man opens his apartment window and yells out, *"who gives a fucking shit?"* Hearing that became a symbol to me. I realized that I didn't have to live up to someone else's expectations.

Now its ten o'clock in the morning and the maid is knocking on my door. I say *"I'm sorry, I stayed out late last night."* I'm tired and a half hour behind schedule. I have many rituals in London of things that I like to do over and over again. I am now late for my visit to Harrods department store. By the time I make it to Chelsea, all hell is breaking loose. There are sirens and police cars and fire engines: complete and total pandemonium. As I proceed up Sloane Street, I find out that an IRA bomb exploded at Harrods a half-hour earlier. Six people died and about a hundred were injured. If I had been on schedule, I would have been in the area of the store that sustained the most damage. I was quite disturbed by this incident.

I start thinking that life is too short, and I decide to go out that night and get picked up. I knew I was about to have my first sexual experience. I was ready. It was quite wonderful. Coincidentally, the fellow who picked me up was a member of the London leather community. He was into some very bizarre sexual scenes and I tried to oblige him as best I could. I was quite reflective over the next couple of days and disturbed about what I had done. It did not seem unnatural to me, however. He was eighteen years my senior and a department head for BBC television. I had a role model of a mature man with a very good job who was also gay. I continued to see him on subsequent trips back to London and we became very good friends. I think through him is where I began to form a positive gay identity. I always think of him with a great deal of affection. Although he is a bit of a stereotypical raving British queen, he is a genuine warm and caring person. I think I was very lucky to meet him.

Now I'm out in England, but I was still maintaining a very solitary life back in Edmonton. I lived eleven lonely months here so I could spend my twelfth month free in England. During my trip in 1984, I made up my mind that it would be my last. That decision was circumvented by my best heterosexual friend in London, Trevor, asking me if I would be the godfather to his youngest child. That was a great honor to me, and I returned to England two more times subsequently.

I continued to go to gay bars in London, and also to find my sexual expression in the leather bars. Throughout this time, I was getting ever more into my fetishes too. I invested quite heavily in leather and latex clothing and the accompanying "toys."

In 1986 at my high school's 75th anniversary, I ran into an old acquaintance who was now married. He classified himself as bisexual and he was active in both the gay scene and the leather scene. I asked him if he would take me to a gay bar in Edmonton.

He agreed. We went to the Roost and to Flashback. I was dressed in leather and latex rubber and he wore full leather. We ended up going out every Saturday night for about three months. Gradually more people started showing up in leather. Seven months later, I and a dozen others founded the leather organization of Edmonton.

I came out to my friends before telling my family, and that was a very positive experience. It really scared me to come out to my London friend Trevor and his wife June. June's response was that it's not who you love that is important, but rather who you are as a person. Brian was totally accepting. I am now very open with him about leather, too.

I came out to my family in 1988. The build up to it was frightening. I was in a relationship and I couldn't make it to family functions when I was invited or I couldn't do this or couldn't do that because of commitments within the relationship. I was becoming a nervous wreck. I took an afternoon off work and went to tell my parents. Their reaction was not what I expected. My parents were supportive, positive, and very accepting. I think my father accepted it quicker than my mother. Even today, I think my mother is concerned about the possibility of contracting AIDS.

Let me tell you more about the leather scene. Since 1984, I would frequent the leather bars whenever I went to England. Walking into a leather bar can be quite scary. There is a great feeling of anxiety mixed with anticipation. Initially, there can be a great deal of distance maintained between patrons. Everybody's guard seems to be up. As the evening progresses the guys become more relaxed with each other. Leather bars are usually fairly dark. Their atmosphere creates an aura of mystery. Frequently they have a dungeon theme. There's a lot of posing and a lot of cruising that occurs.

There is a very close bonding among men who are into the leather scene. Love and trust are a very big part of it. Most of the people I have met are very stable, intelligent, trustworthy people. Some have been very lonely as well. It's not all that it's cracked up to be.

The leather community is part of the greater gay community at large, but we're still seen as something different. I enjoy the uniqueness that comes from being into one of the community's subgroups.

One author has called the leather scene a celebration of death. I don't agree. I think it's a celebration of life. Yes, there are aspects of power and masculinity in it. I look at it more from the aspect of eroticism, however. I have probably been attracted to leather for as long as I can remember. The color, the shine, the smell and the allure are a turn-on for me. Men are extremely visual and there is a heavy visual impact in wearing leather garments. Clothes of any kind can be very erotic, especially during initial physical contact like necking and groping scenes. I prefer to "play" fully or partially clothed in leather because I like the tactile aspect of it and the look of it. As far as any clothing goes, if you've ever listened to another man undress in the dark, it can be quite arousing. From the research I've done, one man in every twenty has a fetish for something.

Valerie Steele, in her book Fetish, describes five levels of fetishism. Five is where you can't achieve orgasm without your fetish. I'm probably at about a two. I don't have to wear leather when I'm with somebody to have orgasm or sexual satisfaction, but it is nice.

Men who are into leather are very much into masculinity. Any garment which conveys masculinity may become an interest or a fetish, like jockstraps for example. A lot of guys are into that. In the age of AIDS, one should be very careful about criticizing so-called leather because the aim is to heighten the erotic experience of sex. When you're into leather, there's so much more that you can do besides fucking. Fantasies can become realities. I have been in leather scenes where neither of us had an orgasm, became naked, nor exposed ourselves. My biggest sex organ is between my ears. I believe it is a very special kind of love to be with somebody and offer them the gift of freedom to explore aspects of their sexuality which they probably have a yearning to explore but haven't yet found the right outlet.

When you get into things like leather play, power dynamics are enacted. That is what a lot of people call "S and M." These labels don't apply, however. Leather sex is consensual, while that which we call sadism and masochism is not. Leather sex is intended to be pleasurable and mutually fulfilling for both parties.

Generally there are defined roles. One is the top (i.e., dominant) and one is the bottom (i.e., passive). Those roles are assigned through trust. My role is generally that of top, but I cannot be that without the consent of the bottom and the bottom cannot be the bottom without my consent. The leather community lives by the motto "safe, sane, and consensual."

Leather sex is done within an etiquette, within rules and guidelines. The rules are set up so that nobody gets hurt. Very often the bottom is given a code word or a gesture that he can use whenever things get out of hand or when he reaches a limit that it is no longer pleasurable for him. If someone is in a scene where he is being hurt physically or mentally, it's time to blow the whistle and stop. Continuing is not healthy for anybody.

A typical scene for me is about control and domination. It's fantasy and its role play. The role playing is probably very healthy in that I do not feel that I have a lot of control or power in my daily life. I've had partners who do have power and control in their daily lives, and when we get together, we can switch roles, do a little bit of play acting, and get it out of our system. It is a release. I don't want to hurt anybody. I inflict pleasure, not pain. What good is a sexual partner who's hurting?

When we get talking about which things are feminine and which are masculine, I get lost in that debate. They are both human. I can't say that being into leather is a rejection of all that is feminine and I can't say that being into drag is a rejection of all that is masculine. I know people who are into both and those who are in between. Leather men can swish as much as drag queens.

When leathermen develop relationships, the power dynamics enjoyed sexually do not usually permeate the relationship itself, unless the partners involved design their relationship with that in mind. Differences exist in any relationships. For example, I know of relationships where there are disparaging differences between income and levels of education. It's up to the couple involved to deal with their unique set of power differences and find their own solutions.

Leather relationships are like any relationship: there are a lot of things that need to be negotiated and agreed upon. We still have to go through the relationship dynamics of being in love and settling in and making the adjustment to live together. My friends in the leather community live normal lives like everybody else.

If anybody wants to sit and talk to me about the leather community, my time is always available. As a responsible leatherman, it is my obligation to educate. I feel that I am open enough that I see the gay community as a whole, rather than as fragmented parts. Don't forget that underneath the leatherman is a human being.

I have never really felt that I have suffered any discrimination. I've never been bashed either. I used to experience a lot of comments like *"hey, fag!"* from passing cars, but I don't now that I'm older.

I am considering a career change and moving to Japan. Although homosexuality is understood and accepted in that culture, westerners may be shunned by the very xenophobic attitude of the Japanese. Furthermore, their perspective of AIDS as being a western disease may lead to discrimination against western gay individuals. There are certain bars that you're not allowed into and certain love hotels, called "Turkish baths" by the Japanese, may not permit entrance to a western man either.

In regard to my continuing development as a gay man, I've had two relationships, one good and one bad, and I think that this aspect of my life is now integrated. There really isn't much more work that I need to do, except the normal things in life that are going to start happening because I'm getting older. I've had to deal with a difficult mid-life crisis, for example, which had nothing to do with being gay.

As an aside, I really dislike the emphasis that North American gay male culture places on youth and beauty. In places like Holland, for example, the older gay man is sought after as much as the young pretty boy. Another issue that is coming to fore is that I am of the generation that has been devastated by AIDS. I have fewer and fewer friends my own age. When I go to the bar, I notice that there are lots of people younger than I am and many who are older. I continue to face the prospect of seeing very close friends wither away and die. That is a serious concern.

When I first came out, I went through a phase of feeling that being gay was almost everything. I wore all the buttons and the badges. I was into volunteer work here, there, and everywhere. I went to bars and did the whole scene. Recently at a cross-cultural workshop, a model called the identity flower was presented. Each petal on the flower represents something about you: where you were born, where you grew up, the language you speak, your gender, etcetera. All of these things together form a flower. That's where I'm at now in terms of positive gay identity. I am a man who happens to be gay. Being gay is merely one petal on the flower, and that is a part of the whole. It's no more or no less important than any other aspect of who I am. I think this is a healthy view of identity.

We can become dreadfully lost in the gay issue. I can become an extremely radical gay person when I want to be, and that particular petal on the flower then becomes prominent. By and large, however, it's just a part of me right now. I can be as open about it as I want to be as I can with any aspect of myself. Being gay is really no big deal. Being so heavily into leather is no big deal. There's a hell of a lot more to me than what you see. I try to look at the whole person when I meet people. You can't make surface judgements on one thing.

One needs to build a positive gay identity because the coming out process never ends. You're always going places and meeting new people. The important issue for me is self-acceptance. Essentially I strive to be a good person. I am an intelligent, educated, aware, productive, taxpaying member of society. I am an integral part of the culture and the political process of the society in which I live. I feel that I deserve all the rights and privileges in society that are accorded to everybody else. Fighting for that right will cause the gay petal on my flower to become a little bit larger and a little bit more important if the situation allows. Above all, I am a human being with human issues. I also happen to be gay.

CO-RESEARCHER #14: *"TROY"*

Present Occupation: University Student

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
24	22	12

Recollections, August 14, 1997

The University of Alberta has a club for gay individuals which I started attending at the beginning of September. For a while I've been thinking that I presently lack co-researchers who are in their twenties. One afternoon I ran into "Troy" at the library, and I asked him for his telephone number to pass on to a friend whom I thought would want to date him. After my short-lived career as a matchmaker soured, I came back to my research question. Troy has always struck me as a happy, well-adjusted gay man. He said he would be pleased to take part in my study, and I interviewed him on December 4, 1996.

Troy's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *At peace with oneself. Striving to be "out" to as many people as possible (i.e., close relationships). Supportive of all struggling (disadvantaged, minority, oppressed groups). Working with the majority, not against it. Politically active -- working for better days ahead.*

Troy's Story:

I thought a lot about your question of how I came to adopt a positive gay identity. I came out when I was going on 23 at which point I felt that I had matured sufficiently. I've noticed that gay teenagers who are out are quite confused. Combined with the ordinary challenges of adolescence, their struggle seems quite overwhelming. I've observed a number of them flunk out of school. I always thought if I had come out five years earlier, I would have been in so much trouble. I think I would have become totally promiscuous, for example.

I'm from a small town of three thousand just outside of Toronto. Nobody was out in either junior or senior high school. Nobody ever asked me if I was gay because I didn't have any of the stereotypical traits. There was no reason for people to suspect or to wonder.

I had felt different since I was three-years old, however. I remember sitting on my uncle's lap at around age six and thinking that it was really exciting compared to sitting on my aunt's or my mom's lap. As a young child, I don't believe you can really have a sexual attraction or urge, but there was something there.

Even before the age of five, I had dolls and I played dress up. I remember a couple of times finding my mom's makeup and letting loose with it. My dad built me a little play house. None of my male friends had them but my female friends had something similar. I don't remember negative reactions from anybody. My interests were actually quite varied. I also went to the pond and caught frogs, for example.

I remember being on a trip with my parents when I was twelve. I had a sexual dream of being with another guy. For the rest of the trip I couldn't get this off my mind. Thinking about the experience in the dream felt really exciting and good, so why did I feel so bad about myself? I felt slightly depressed as I was reminded of my earlier childhood. The dream made me realize the way in which I was different, and another part of me thought I cannot accept this. This began my battle against it.

Before adolescence I don't have any memories of attraction. During my adolescence I thought lots about sex . . . with guys. I always remember thinking this is just a phase. Next year I'll outgrow this. It never happened.

I was starting to look at men a lot around this time. I remember being attracted to guys in my classes and gym teachers. When I masturbated, all of my sexual fantasies involved men. I tried to fantasize about women, but it wasn't there. I felt guilty about my homosexual fantasies.

I first had sex when I was in grade thirteen. I was at a party and I consumed a lot of alcohol. I received a blow job from a girl. Although I felt no attraction toward her, I remember thinking that maybe there was hope for me yet.

I became more sexual when I was attending Carleton University at age nineteen. I developed a relationship that fall with Jodine. We had a great relationship, including sexually. She had a very aggressive personality and I think that is what enabled us to develop a sexual relationship. She initiated it and I went along for the ride. If it had been left up to me, it probably would never have happened. During sex, I continued to fantasize about men.

I thought I was on top of the world because I finally had what was socially acceptable. We were together for two years, but I continued thinking about guys. As the relationship became more serious, I became frightened. We started having trouble getting along and neither of us remained happy. She eventually ended the relationship.

I know that I hung on toward the end because our relationship was like a security blanket. I had what society and my family expected of me. We saw each other off and on through that, but it was hard. I was pretty depressed for the first half of 1994.

Toward the spring, there was a girl who was attracted to me. We were in classes together and we went out a few times. I ended up back at her place and she wanted things to happen, but there was nothing. I just wanted to get out of there fast. Afterwards I felt so embarrassed and stupid. What was I doing? This isn't what I want. I knew the direction I was about to take. I had to explore the other side.

I started to detach myself from former friends and I spent the whole fall alone while exploring. I did research in the library and started reading everything about homosexuality. There was also a phone support line in Ottawa and I remember calling it on week nights. I wanted to know what was out there and what things were like. I was pretty hesitant.

I felt a lot of turmoil and fear. I believed that gay people were not normal. They're all freaks. The images in your head are terrible. For me, the worst stereotype was that all gays are effeminate. Just before Christmas 1994, I saw a poster for a "coming out" group that was being offered by one of the youth agencies in Ottawa.

I started attending the group in January. That's where I started to meet gay people for the first time. I was very nervous at first, but I soon realized that these people were what I considered normal. It became quite a comfortable setting. I ended up coming out that month. I immediately bonded with two guys there and we became friends quickly. It felt so good to be with others and I started to go to the gay bars with them. I began to see the bars as a place where I could go and be safe. I can sit and talk with these people and flirt if I chose. I could be myself.

With one of the guys in the group I developed my first physical relationship. It lasted about two weeks. I wasn't attracted to him overwhelmingly, but I wanted to know what this is like. I trusted him and felt safe with him. I knew that this is what I wanted and I didn't feel any guilt.

I went home for the summer and I went to the gay pride weekend in Toronto. It was great to see the size of their gay community. Everyone that lives in the area of Church Street is gay. I felt really good and very comfortable being there.

I came out to my mom that summer as well. Her reaction was great. She was like "*hey, this is okay, don't worry.*" I was the one all shaken up. I'm getting all emotional because I'm telling her, but it didn't change anything for her. She told me that she had suspected since I was a teenager. I was not ready yet to come out to my dad. I didn't feel any urgency because my parents are not together. Both of them are remarried in fact.

Following the summer, I went back for my last year at school and I lived with one of the guys I had met in the group. That was a really positive experience because I could be totally open and free and have someone to talk to about being gay. This guy was great. He had his head on his shoulders.

He introduced me to Warren in September 1995. It was amazing. We went to a movie the first time and we went back to his place afterwards and I just freaked out. I was all nerves. He just turned on the television and made us some tea. I was expecting to be jumped or something. I didn't know what to expect because I had never been in this situation before. I was attracted to him, but I was a wreck. I split fairly quickly that night and the next weekend we went out and he told me to relax. He said we would take things slow and that he wasn't going to jump me.

It didn't' take me long to feel comfortable with Warren. I was infatuated with him initially, and now I am in love with him. I want to be with him for a long time. Compared to how I felt toward Jodine earlier, this seems like miles apart. I feel an overwhelming certainty. There's no doubt, everything feels right.

I only came out to my dad in August. I really didn't' know how it was going to go and I was pretty scared. He said *"well, this isn't what I wanted, this isn't what I dreamed of, but I still love you."* I gave him a book to read because he's not that easy to talk to. Even after I told him, a week later I had dinner with him and it didn't come up in conversation. I felt like saying *"what are you thinking? What's going on in your head?"* There still isn't any talk about it. Although I knew he wouldn't receive it well, I was tired of lying and pretending. I was tired of answering the *"any new girlfriend?"* question. I think it's going to take him awhile.

I had a decent upbringing so I turned out okay because of that. I'm really lucky that I had great parents. By the time I came out, I also feel that I had my head on my shoulders by that point. A good upbringing and positive parenting are the two factors I think had the most to do with my development of a positive gay identity. That has an effect on the people that you hang out with, the things you do, and your outlook on life. For example, my mom is my biggest supporter, and she has been since the day I told her. I have not had a bad experience with anyone that I have come out to. It has all been very positive. I think my positive gay identity just grew out of me being a positive person and a decent person.

The other thing I thought about was my dad and my dad's family. They're very image conscious and conservative. That has had an impact on what I'm like as well. To an extent this is a positive thing, but to another extent it is not. My mother is very carefree and unconcerned about image. I can see the advantage of both approaches.

I would like to learn more about gay history, literature, and the arts. I'd also like to become more politically active. One thing I am dealing with now in my development as a gay man is the whole dynamic of a gay relationship and the trust factor. I think we're bombarded by the stereotype that gay men are pigs and sluts. Consequently, I find it difficult to trust. Warren is living in Ontario, and I am here in Edmonton attending university. We don't express it as such to each other, but because it is a long-distance relationship, the issue is there. I think about my relationship a lot and where it will be in the future. I hope it will survive the temporary distance.

CO-RESEARCHER #15: *"ANDREW"*

Present Occupation: Education Coordinator

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
30	19-or-20	12-or-13

Recollections, August 14, 1997

"Andrew" is another person referred to me by my partner. I had met Andrew before and I knew him to be a gregarious, articulate young man. Although he completed a law degree, he has presently embarked upon a career to educate individuals about HIV and AIDS. I interviewed him on December 7, 1996.

Andrew's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

> *Positive gay identity for me begins with self-identification as a gay man or lesbian. Increasingly, there is an awareness, understanding, and reconciliation with the world in which we live, the way we are socialized, and the way it affects our lives. This does not necessarily mean "out," but by necessity means a willingness to see, and work with, our own homophobia.*

Andrew's Story:

In a lot of ways, I think we create our story and once set, I'm not sure how much we revisit it. For the past five years, my perspective has been that it was easy. When I think about it today, however, I think it was actually quite hard.

It was a long process for me. Like many gay people, I had the perception that I was different, but I didn't know that I was queer. As a young teenager, my awareness began to change because of my sister's experience.

Karen moved out on her sixteenth birthday and moved in with an older man. On her eighteenth birthday, she married him. The marriage lasted less than a year, and after that she travelled through Europe. When she returned, she told my two brothers and I that she was a lesbian. Then she came out to our parents and that was when I really started thinking about my own sexuality.

There were a lot of really negative consequences in our home around her disclosure. My parents were pretty horrible about how they dealt with her, and they ended up completely isolating her from the house. She made a special effort to be part of my life by coming to school and hanging out with me. Mom and dad didn't know about it.

Her experience reinforced for me that coming out was a bad and dangerous thing to do. It cost her a lot in terms of her relationship with dad and her ability to have a relationship with us. Although her disclosure may have sped up my questioning of my own gayness, it may have delayed my eventual decision to live as an out gay man. Either way, her coming out is very much wrapped up in my process.

My dad's father was a police officer, and he was very negative about homosexuality in his working years. That message got conveyed to dad. My mother grew up in a much more liberal, well-educated family of doctors. It took five-to-seven years of strained relationships before my parents were able to deal with Karen's sexuality. They were blatantly homophobic. She's also very political and in your face which added an extra layer of challenge for my parents.

With Karen's influence, I got a much better political grasp on being gay than most children would receive. I quickly realized that I was gay and what it meant. I had sexual fantasies about males, not females, and I knew I was really attracted to guys. I knew what the power issues were and what it meant for me and how it could or would affect my life. Even as I saw progress with mom and dad and Karen, I knew it would be different for me because I was male. I started dealing with it quietly.

When I was sixteen or seventeen, my parents were afraid that maybe I was also gay, and they asked me. I completely denied it. I was afraid too because earlier they had threatened Karen that if I or one of my brothers turned out gay, they would never forgive her.

I didn't want to be gay in high school so I stayed busy with other stuff. I had girlfriends and I enjoyed some sexual activity with them. I wanted to have a place in the straight world. I hoped I would change and become heterosexual, but I knew I wouldn't.

I attended a very liberal and accepting high school. There was one guy there that everyone knew was gay. He was incredibly flaming. He was so totally outrageous that everyone loved him because they didn't know what else to make of him. He could get away with being who he was. Although I was totally aware of gay identity, I knew that I couldn't have it yet. This wasn't the time or the place.

I nearly had a sexual experience with a male when I was in grade eleven. I spent a lot of time together with a fellow student over a couple of weeks. He really wanted something to happen and he constantly pushed me. I wasn't ready, however. I slept over one night and we talked about masturbation. I ended up watching him masturbate and then we talked about it. I was petrified to go near him or touch him for fear that someone would catch us.

In grade thirteen, I had my first sexual experience with a male. I knew it was going to happen and I let it happen. After the one experience, I acted like a total prick and disappeared completely out of his life. I didn't talk to him again or return his phone calls. I thought that he was too gay for me. I still regret how I ended it with him. I was a pig. Nonetheless, it was a confirming experience. I felt that I did what I needed to do, but then I put it away and decided I would have to deal with it later. That would happen when I was no longer in this town and away from mom and dad.

After attending Carleton University briefly, I relocated and studied liberal arts at the University of Toronto. My prime motive for moving away to university was not to discover my sexuality. I wanted to have different life experiences, see the rest of the country, and meet new and interesting people. I wanted to escape my banal existence in Ontario. I knew about my sexuality and I wasn't ready to deal with it. The rest of my life was more important.

I worked in the Columbia ice fields during the summers. Between forty and fifty of us worked together and we got to know each other really well. I developed some incredible crushes on people there. We lived in a maze of Atco trailers and I slept with different people in a completely nonsexual way. It was a trusting, open environment.

During the school year, I worked at a straight bar in Toronto that was incredibly homophobic. It was owned by Bruce and his wife Janet. About a week after I started there, Bruce told the managers to fire me because he thought I was gay. They spoke with Janet and an incredible fight ensued. Bruce lost and I kept my job. Maybe two months later, Bruce watched me perform on an incredibly busy night. At the end of my shift he looked at me directly in the eye and said *"I apologize, and I take back everything that I said about you."* My performance helped him get over a barrier around my sexuality. I stayed there for the next four-and-a-half years. I also strategically dated waitresses there in order to maintain neutrality around my sexuality.

I also had sex with these women, but this did not threaten my gay identity. I had complete identification with men as sexual and emotional partners. Having sex with women was physically enjoyable, but that didn't make me question being gay at all. I was completely entrenched in the fact that I was a gay man. I also had a boyfriend then, which I'll come back to momentarily.

I attended the University of Toronto between ages twenty-one and twenty-five. I was twenty-two or twenty-three before I could say I was gay. I first disclosed to my sister and a close female friend whom I knew would be okay with it.

I don't think it could have happened before then because there was too much going on. By that time as well Karen had been reintroduced in our lives and mom and dad were doing a lot better with it. They accepted Karen and her partners, and she ended up moving back home. They even helped her get back in university. Today they enjoy an excellent relationship.

I had two boyfriends in Toronto beginning at age twenty-three. My first boyfriend was Jerry. It was not anything significant, however. It was a process of discovery as both of us were becoming active gay men while still dealing with our own internalized homophobia. The fact that we were closeted destroyed our relationship. It lasted five or six months.

Following this relationship I was single again for quite a while before meeting Don. He had a really glamorous life. Although we never seemed to spend a lot of time together, the time we did spend together was marvellous. It took me about three months to figure out that he was married. I wasn't able to stop the relationship then, however. I loved him. It lasted for about a year.

After our break up, I found it difficult to function in Toronto because everything reminded me of him. I was pathetic and miserable. After applying to a number of law schools, I accepted an offer from the University of Calgary. I began there in September 1991.

I had a brief two-week relationship with a guy who was a film set designer. He was in his late thirties and we went out for dinner. That was a new experience for me. I felt I could hold my ground on topics like Canadian and American politics. When something came up around the history of HIV and AIDS, however, I knew absolutely nothing. I didn't know anything about Queer Nation or any kind of queer history or culture. He looked at me completely aghast when he realized that I had no history at all.

I thought *"how dare you be offended by me not having this depth around being gay."* He was really well-versed. I think he'd been an out gay man for a long time. That was the beginning of my search for that information and history. I started reading and it was shortly after that that I met Gary. We developed a healthy relationship that was honest and openly gay.

Within six months of living in Calgary I had started living an openly gay life. I was totally ready. I felt like I'd arrived. I began disclosing to a number of people at law school. Within a couple of months, the Alberta Human Rights Commission held a panel discussion at the law faculty. I felt totally comfortable standing up and talking about my experience as a gay man living in Alberta in front of all my peers. I couldn't have done that two months earlier.

Nothing was ever said to my face, but I think some of my peers became more distant from me after that. The people that I was close to became closer, however. Some of my relationships with faculty changed too, but that may have had more to do with the fact that my focus on studying was somewhat diverted because of my night job in a gay bar, which I will tell you about shortly. I think I became more honest with myself and if I didn't like something, I spoke up. I suspect that changed my relationship with some faculty as well.

When I first moved to Calgary, I still wasn't comfortable going into a gay bar, so I decided that a perfect job would be to work in one. I thought of the bar as a safe gay environment where I would meet gay people. I landed a job in a gay bar and spent the first two months with my jaw hanging to the ground, absolutely shocked. My learning curve was incredible and I was ready to explore.

My experience there helped me to better understand gay stereotypes. I decided that the totally over the top hairdressers and out gay men were incredibly honest, exciting, interesting, fun, and full of original thought. I think what made those people fun and interesting was their comfort level with themselves and their acceptance of gay culture and the world in which they live. Alternatively, the straight-looking, straight-acting gays seemed to be uncomfortable with their bodies, their selves, and their environment. I didn't find them genuine.

I wondered if straight-acting gays are simply playing a role, but I don't think it's so cut and dried. Some straight-acting gays seem deathly afraid to me that family and work will find out that they're gay. The only place that they're really gay is at the bar. Perhaps after a number of drinks, they find a man and that's it. The next day, they're back in their other life. That's at one extreme. Then there are gays who seem to accept their gayness and don't hide it, but they still live straight lives outside of their gay lives. At the other extreme are people who live, eat, breathe, and sleep their gayness. They are immersed in being gay, like as a culture. I don't think that either extreme is healthy.

The immersion thing happened for me while I worked in the gay bar. While I was there, I think I lost a really important chunk of the rest of my community -- like straight friends and school friends. There was a period of about a year-and-a-half where I don't think I did much socially with people who weren't gay. It was an important time for me, though, as I learned a lot about myself and a lot about gay culture.

Readiness is an important point here. My disclosure to others and my immersion did not occur until I was in a place of power and where the cost wouldn't outweigh the benefit. When I started learning about my history as a gay man, it had a lot to do with my development and my identification with gay politics. When I began to question gay political issues and think of them for myself, I started thinking about the way we're portrayed in media and the limited access that gay youth have to positive images and role models.

At the end of that process, I felt ready to come out to my mom and dad. I was twenty-six. They no longer had power over me by blaming it on Karen. I talked to Karen about it beforehand and then I realized that they'd done so much growing then as parents of gay children that it wouldn't be an issue anymore.

My mom came out to visit, followed shortly by my dad's arrival. I disclosed to mom and it filled the gap in our relationship. It felt really good to bring her up to speed on the experiences in my life. It was almost cathartic.

When dad arrived, I told him. His reaction was couched in terms of real concern for me, for my future, and my ability to practice law and have a meaningful existence in a discriminatory world. He's very cerebral and articulate, and less in touch with feeling. He accepted my disclosure in an almost resigned way. I thought that that was the end of it until last Christmas.

John and I had been together for about a year already. I was finally with a partner whom I envisioned being with for the rest of my life. That was the first time that had happened. I wanted my parents to meet him and we planned on going to my parent's home for Christmas. Mom and Karen were very happy about the prospect. When dad found out, however, he hit the roof. He basically said that it wasn't going to happen.

I was very angry, hurt, and offended by this. With Karen he's arrived, but he still hangs onto a perception that sex between men is dirty. My father continues to have really negative stereotypes and visions of gay-male sexuality. I was very disappointed in this reaction, but I've gotten over my anger. Until he meets a partner of mine and realizes that gay men are not all flaming queens, I don't think he will break his negative stereotypes. I don't think he can get there on his own. Nonetheless, telling dad was like the closing of a chapter. I would now be better able to integrate being gay into the rest of my life.

John and I broke up this past spring after being together for fifteen-to-sixteen months. Mom was incredibly supportive in all the ways that a mother can be. I think she now sees my partner as a person I've chosen to spend my life with as opposed to viewing him as a gender or an orientation. My dad is not there yet.

When I entered law school, I knew that I wanted to study law and that it wasn't necessarily about practicing law. However, the fact that the law profession is incredibly homophobic has something to do with the fact that I'm not there and I'm not practicing it. My work environment now is incredibly supportive and the work is very meaningful to me. The fact that I did not want to article, and have not articled, has something to do with my decision to be an out gay man. I won't let go of the power that gives me personally. I would need to practice law and exist in that profession on my own terms. Finding a comfortable place for me and my sexuality in the larger world is an ongoing challenge, but less so every day.

I've certainly been a victim of emotional violence and verbal harassment, but I have never been assaulted or discriminated against in a really obvious way. I also am aware that any number of jobs or opportunities may not have been offered to me because there was either the perception or the knowledge that I was gay. I have no idea if I didn't get a summer job at a law firm because I have an air or appearance of being gay, or if it was because my resume reflects my gay journey. My attributions for why things have happened may be completely different from why they actually happened. I do have a fear of violence and a number of my friends have been severely assaulted. That has a direct impact on me in my personal relationships and on my social and political identity.

In this short interview, I can't do justice to some of the incredible loneliness and feelings of despair that I've gotten over. Because I've left those behind, I think I've really built a wall around them. They were most prevalent during my teenage years. It was more than being denied romantic interests or pursuing contact with men. It was more about being isolated from a community and an identity. These feelings had a social context. The loneliness was about having no culture around me that reflects the sexual part of my identity. There was no way to be validated as a gay person at that time. Although I had access to some validation from a gay sibling who developed personal power, it wasn't mine and I didn't feel like I could grab a hold of it and own it. It wasn't there for me.

This undercurrent of isolation continued until I had control and power in my life in other ways, like financial independence, career direction, and the identity and ownership that comes in your life with being away from home. Once I had that kind of power over my life, the despair around sexuality for me almost disappeared. I knew there would be a time and place where I would arrive.

In my continuing development as a gay man, I think I need to accept the fact that I'm still a little homophobic. I need to find a balanced place for my sexuality and how it affects who I am in the rest of my life.

When I look at my current challenges as a gay man, I think one of my biggest is looking at how to integrate my gay identity into my overall sense of being. I did the immersion experience where everything I did was gay or gay-related. It's been part of my journey. What's left for me is to integrate who I am into the rest of my life so that my sexuality is a part of me that doesn't define me. Somewhere in the middle of that continuum is complete acceptance of who I am, but where being gay is not more important in defining me than the sports I enjoy, or my profession, for example.

CO-RESEARCHER #16: *"ALEX"*

Present Occupation: Executive Director

Current Age	Age at "Coming Out"	Age of First Awareness
22	11-or-12	(always aware)

Recollections, August 16, 1997

In reviewing the stories of my co-researchers to date, I concluded that the majority of them have had a pretty good start in life. Most are well-educated or have grown up in positive families. Is it possible to develop a positive gay identity when life's circumstances have not been so privileged? What would that construction of identity look like?

As I pondered this question, my ex-wife suggested I interview "Alex," a younger gay man who once worked for her. I had talked briefly to him once before, and I remember he had earlier been a gay activist. Eventually I made contact with Alex, and I interviewed him on December 8, 1996.

Unlike the other co-researchers, Alex did not have my questionnaires completed at the time of our interview. Subsequently, I telephoned him repeatedly, but he failed to return my calls. On one occasion when he answered his telephone, he said he would call right back. He never did. Since then he has moved.

I felt gravely disappointed and angry at what I considered to be his avoidance behavior. I couldn't help but wonder why. Was it concern that he had not achieved this undefined construct I'm studying called "positive gay identity?" Did my interview evoke too many painful memories? Is he simply too busy for this right now?

As I pull myself away from my own ego, I am reminded that gay people have often faced rejection from many levels: the personal, the familial, the social, and the societal. My feeling of rejection by Alex is nothing compared to that which we have all faced in our journey toward self-acceptance and self-love.

I don't know if I will ever see Alex again. Nonetheless, his story remains. He is the last person I interviewed.

Alex's Definition of "Positive Gay Identity":

(None provided).

Alex's Story:

I was born outside Toronto on an Objibiau native reserve. Within three months, I was apprehended by the Children's Aid Society and went into foster care where I spent just under the first year-and-a-half of my life.

I was adopted by a white family and we moved around Ontario. My native ancestry was never discussed. In the last four or five years, I've really begun looking at the Objibiau nation and first-nation issues in general. I am gradually identifying with my native heritage. By law, I'll be able to classify for native-treaty status once I find family-of-origin information about my birth mother. I've placed my name on the register in Ontario to try to connect with her. It's a long process.

As far as I know, my birth father was from Ireland. It was a very short-lived relationship between he and my mother . . . probably about 45 minutes. To my knowledge, he had no idea that I ever existed.

At age six, I knew I was different from my family in the sense of skin color and hair color. Until I reached puberty, I was very dark skinned. As I've gotten older, I've become whiter. No one ever assumes I am native.

I was also different in another sense. I remember having crushes on boys as early as grade one. I also knew this was wrong. I lived in a small town, and gay people were described as sick individuals. I chased girls so I would fit in.

Growing up with my adoptive parents was not a positive event in my life. I officially lived with them until I was fifteen, but until I was twelve, I watched my father physically and emotionally abuse my mother. He was a very angry man. He communicated poorly and he did not know how to share his feelings. He was a high-ranking RCMP officer who became an alcoholic over time.

My parents are relatively well off and we always lived in a nice house. We learned to keep our family secrets to ourselves. I remember dad getting mom on the floor and striking her. At age six or seven, I would try to stop it. After her assault would end, she would start on me. I was abused physically and emotionally. Both of them would call me a liar, cheat, thief, and momma's boy. They would continually put me down.

In retrospect, I suppose I earned a number of their adjectives. I stole, I lied, and I fought. I lied to teachers about trivial things so I would get caught. I remember sitting in the principal's office, crying and begging *"please don't call my parents, please don't, I can't go home. Can I stay at the school?"*

The principal wouldn't listen. He phoned my mother, and after I got home, she would tell me to wait until dad arrived. Once home, he would remove his belt and say *"so what have you done today?"* That was the worst experience.

When I turned twelve, it all started changing. I was maturing physically and I became more of a target for physical abuse. Whenever I tried to help mother during her assaults, he would hit me and send me to my room. He would strike me in the face, throw me on the floor, or push and shove me.

I struggled in school, not from a lack of brains, but because I wanted to struggle. I wanted somebody to say *"hey, why are you failing gym in grade five?"* My brother, who is their natural child, received preferential treatment. He rarely experienced my father's abuse. He moved at age fifteen to attend university. He had skipped grades three and five and finished high school in Ontario in three years, instead of the customary five. He was happy that he didn't have to live at home anymore.

At age six, I was sexually abused by a twenty-year-old cousin. That summer we were in Newfoundland and I slept in a tent with him. Although my memories are vague, there was touching involved and I performed oral sex on him. One of the hardest thing for me to struggle with as a teenager was whether or not I liked it. The sexual behavior was exciting and daring and I thought my cousin must really like me to show me his penis. I thought it was alright.

Like many male victims of sexual abuse, I didn't see it as abuse. I didn't make the connection that this person was twenty and I was six. I have thought about this abuse quite often. I was angry at myself because when I was eight or nine, everyone on the school yard knew what faggots were, so I assumed I was a faggot.

Around the age of eight or nine, I started hanging out with three agemates and we would show and touch each other's genitals. I think we even tried to penetrate each other. We did this in different places, often at someone's house during a sleepover. No one saw this as a bad thing. It continued until we were probably thirteen or so.

I lived in Ontario when I was twelve years old. One Saturday afternoon I was at the games arcade when a guy offered me a cigarette. I took it because I wanted to be cool. Then he offered me a ride home, and while we're driving away, he said *"do you mind if we stop at my* *place?"* I replied *"not at all."* Once there, he asked me if I do drugs, and I said *"yes."* In truth, I had never done drugs in my life. Then he began playing a gay porn movie.

My head raced as I thought *"this is bad, this is bad. Alex, you're being bad. Your parents will kill you."* I knew he wanted sex. As he started touching my leg, I became uncomfortable. He said *"I can give you drugs for it if you want."* That became my introduction to drugs. I smoked a cocaine joint and thought *"wow, this feels great."* I sat in his apartment all afternoon. We did drugs, he touched me, I sucked him off, and that was it. He was around thirty-years old.

I went home and threw up. I was sick with myself that I'd seen the porn movies, and I knew that I had just done something wrong. Nonetheless, I have no idea why but I had given him my phone number.

I remember the day he phoned. I met him on the corner of my street and we went back to his apartment again. He had a friend there. Throughout the night we did lines of cocaine for the first time and I had sex with both of them. His friend gave me thirty dollars which was like half a week's paper delivery.

I thought he liked me, but let's be honest . . . he didn't like me. He gave me attention, bought me lunch, told me how smart and how nice I was, and complemented me on my looks. Our sexual liaison continued.

One day we're at McDonalds and he began talking to a teenager. I was getting pissed off, wondering what the fuck is going on. I felt incredibly jealous. The teen finally leaves, but we drive by him later that night. We pick him up and take him by the river. He was waiting for someone to pick him up. That is when I learned about prostitution.

One night I walked down to the river by myself. I was curious. Although I told myself that I wouldn't do it with anybody, that soon changed. By the end of the night a guy had given me twenty dollars for sucking him off. He was over fifty.

He gave me the attention I wanted. I'm sure I would have done it for free at that point. I knew I wouldn't be able to explain the money to my parents, so I ate twenty dollars worth of McDonald's food before going home.

I continued seeing the thirty-year old. The cocaine became the reason I would see him -- not the sex, the money, or the attention. I think I used cocaine partly as a way of avoiding the realization that I was gay. In my mind, I was there for the drugs, not the sex. I believed that what I was doing was wrong. I knew that if my friends found out that I was having sex with this guy, they would all freak and they'd beat me up because faggots were not good. Nonetheless, I was still getting it on with the friends I mentioned earlier who were my age.

I also started sleeping with girls when I was twelve. I honestly grew up thinking everybody was getting it on. All my friends were. We'd go to parties at age twelve and thirteen and there was definitely lots of sex happening. They were all smoking dope and drinking too.

By age thirteen, I knew I liked the sexual activity and that it made me feel good. I started thinking I might be gay. Things at home were just horrible and by now I knew all of the bad downtown kids. One of them named George, a sixteen-year old, was going to Toronto and I went with him. I cleaned out my bank account and ran away.

An older friend of George's arranged a hotel room for us in Toronto. I began prostituting. I became familiar with the gay ghetto in Toronto and hung out with hustlers and prostitutes. After five or six weeks, I returned home.

I also returned to school. I was clean, I got a haircut, and I started selling drugs. I was now a cocaine addict. I went to this party where they were all smoking dope and I said "*hey man, I've got something that's way cooler than that.*" I pulled out some cocaine and no one in this room had ever seen it. People started loving it. Within five months a large number of senior students at my school were using cocaine on a weekly basis. A year later, many of them had become daily users. I blame a lot of that on myself.

I got hooked up with boys in New York who started supplying the school with drugs. Once drugs became involved, violence erupted. The school didn't know what to do. I was on student council, and everyone on council was coked out pretty well except for one Mormon girl.

Everyone liked me at school and I was a good fighter. No one could take me down. If someone needed someone beaten up, I'd do it. I just didn't have a conscience. I wouldn't need a reason to beat someone up either. If someone looked at me funny in class, I'd freak out on them.

By the time I was fifteen, I'd used every drug that was available on the street. Eventually a large drug bust occurred at my school, and although I was connected to everybody, I wasn't charged or even arrested. In response, my parents sent me to Ottawa to live with my aunt and uncle.

The friend who had brought me to Toronto a year earlier was beaten to death. I remember that day because I thought I was a tough guy, I'm strong, I'm rich, and it doesn't matter to me. However, I started asking myself "*what am I involved in? Where am I? What am I doing?*" I decided that I needed to get clean.

The first night at my relatives, I went to the mall and I smoked a joint with these other kids. I remember telling myself *"no, I can't do that."* The worst thing I did after that was smoke cigarettes.

It went really well for about six months. School was going better than ever, mostly because I had no friends and I didn't know anyone. I didn't have anything else to do. Then I began thinking more about being gay. I would meet people and sort of hint that I was gay.

Then I met this girl and started dating her. I was sleeping with her too, along with a regime of guys. As I was turning sixteen, I came out of the closet, fully and completely in my school, and dumped the girlfriend. I came out to her which was like an annunciation to the world.

My parents ended up moving to Ottawa and I moved in with them. Everything began to collapse. Things at home were just horrible, whereas the six months with my uncle was wonderful. I hated living back home, and school went downhill. I felt incredibly suicidal.

My suicidal feelings were not only the result of my parents. While I prostituted from ages twelve through fifteen, the first five times that I had anal sex was with men who forced it on me. I didn't know what to do about it. Was I supposed to tell my mother? *"Mom, I was a prostitute and I was raped five times. Pass the potatoes please."* I wanted to die and my father was driving me up the wall too.

I was also bothered by thoughts like *"oh my God, I'm gay. I can't live a normal life, I can't have children, I can't have kids."* I also thought that nobody liked me and that school was horrible. I tried to play on the rugby team and I did really well, but dad didn't care.

I was sixteen, and I wanted to die. I bought a gun and I had a hard time deciding whether I would use it on me or my dad. One night while sitting beside the Ottawa river, I began crying. I didn't know what to do. I had the gun with me, and I ended up throwing it in the river. I went home and packed.

The next day I wrote my parents a letter telling them how much I disliked living there. I moved out and never lived at home again. That was eight years ago.

I asked for help from child welfare in Ontario. They told me I wasn't eligible for services because I was sixteen. I told them that my parents were abusing me, but because mom and dad denied it, it took me sixty-two days to get services. I continued attending school while working part-time at a health-food store and prostituting everyday. I eventually got my own apartment. Everyone in school knew I was gay. Then I meet this guy named Franklin.

Franklin was a gorgeous twenty-six year old model. I also found out that he owned a business in Ottawa. We went to his place and showered before having sex. We started seeing each other on a regular basis.

Franklin owned the most expensive men's underwear store in Ottawa. His partner, whom he lived with for seven years, was the fashion designer. I dropped out of school and began spending nearly all of my time with Franklin. I met everyone who is everyone in the gay community because they all came to his store.

Our relationship hit a peak during the summer. One day I woke up at Franklin's house with a really sore neck. I had a lump. It hurt to move. The lump grew and I began thinking I must be dying of AIDS.

I returned to school that fall. One day in class, I had to leave early because I thought my head was going to explode. I walked to my mother's doctor who then rushed me to the hospital. The lump turned out to be an abscess. I called Franklin, and he arranged a private room for me. All of Franklin's friends, who I'd already met, heard that I was in the hospital. My entire room became filled with $60-70 bouquets of flowers. I also had a $400 statuette with flowers around it which said *"I hope that you're feeling better."* My parents were in complete awe when they arrived. They asked where all of this came from, and I told them about Franklin.

After my parents met Franklin, my mom asked if he was gay. I told her he was and that I was thinking of moving in with him. The day of Armageddon had arrived. She said if I did that, I should never call her. After I left the hospital, I stayed with Franklin to recuperate.

Franklin called my parents to tell them I was staying with him. They freaked out. I went home to talk to them, and after some fighting, I just said *"mom and dad, I'm gay."* They said they knew. My father said *"it's alright, son, we'll bring you to a doctor."* My mom, on the other hand, asked my older brother to kick me out of the house because I was gay. She told me to never come back and never call again. I said fine.

I really enjoyed being with Franklin, and I ended up moving in with him more permanently after the confrontation with my parents. By this point I was a flamer. I was hanging out with incredibly queer people, and I was beginning to get a sense of queer identity. I was also doing a lot of modelling for Franklin's fashion shows.

Every spring Franklin hosted a benefit for the AIDS community of Ottawa. The event was a fashion show held on a cruise ship. We wore black ties and arrived in a rented Rolls Royce. This begins the story of how I came out at school. As I got out of the car, a fellow student from school was waiting to greet us. Tony knew me from rugby and he was also in my English class. As the fashion show began and I appeared on the runway, the entire crowd cheered because they all knew me. I removed my robe, leaving my body clad in only a pair of boxer shorts. At sixteen, I had a six-pack stomach and I was in great shape and tanned. The crowd cheered and yelled loudly. Tony sat there stunned.

I returned to school on Monday. As I walked into English class, there was complete silence. Everybody in the school already knew. The only time I ever got any flack for being gay was from a grade-nine punk. He called me a faggot so I lifted him up against the lockers and said *"sorry, what did you say to me?" "Nothing man, nothing." "Just checking."* That was the end of that.

I was on student council at the school and everybody knew me and liked me already so being gay wasn't a big issue. I left that school shortly thereafter, however, because I wanted to go to a semestered school.

My friend Roger and I went to a school near our house and inquired into beginning there in the fall. The principal was completely atrocious. He called us faggots. Roger had a Caesar cut, and he wore makeup and a tight shirt with nipple rings showing through. We both wore earrings. The principal just didn't know how to handle us and he said that it would be a cold day in hell before homosexuals started coming to his school. We went to the school board and they forced him to let us in.

When Roger and I went to register, the principal warned us, *"when the **real** students beat you up, don't come looking for pity here because you won't find any."* He made us sign a contract saying that if we missed more than two classes we'd be expelled.

After I left that day, I decided I would not attend that school. That's when I started becoming more political. I called one of the adult supporters who had helped us get into the school and I let her know what happened. We ended up holding a press conference. Roger and I spoke about how degrading and abusive this principal was. The school board responded by holding a forum on the topic of sexuality in schools. This principal was eventually demoted. I was amazed at what we had accomplished.

Franklin wasn't all that amazed, however, because I wasn't in school and I wasn't working. Instead, I was going to the bar every night. Consequently, he kicked me out. I went to a shelter for kids because I didn't know where else to go. I couldn't go home and I couldn't really stay with friends. While I was there I saw this poster for a protest on Parliament Hill about homelessness and homeless kids. By this point I was pretty comfortable with being gay. I had been surrounded by gay people for just about a year. Everyone I knew was gay, everyone I talked to was gay, and everything I did was gay. I ate at gay restaurants, I went to gay bars, and I listened to gay music.

I went to the protest. Some neo-Nazi's wanted to kill me because they knew I was a faggot. I challenged their leader, but Anne, the coordinator of the protest, came over and ended it. I decided to stay there all night with them because they were actually a pretty cool group. At about four in the morning, I asked Anne where these kids would end up tomorrow. She said she didn't know. Parliament Hill has a big lawn with stone gates right on the sidewalk. That night we slept on the sidewalk protesting the lack of housing for street youth.

I returned the next night and there were around seventy people who slept over. The next night there were about thirty-five kids there. A couple of days later we decided we were going to stay and we formed a collective. We bought a couple of blue tent tarps to put over us. This began in October, and by April, we had six tents and two extra tarps with the entire compound surrounded in hay. One of the tarps was used as a kitchen complete with a stove. We fed about a hundred and fifty people every single day.

We stayed right through minus forty-degree weather. The bottom line is that we couldn't leave because there were so many kids counting on us to be there. About three hundred and fifty kids slept there throughout the winter. In the whole time I slept indoors maybe ten nights out of the whole winter.

That was my first introduction to political involvement and speaking out. It was such an incredible experience. It introduced me to the whole theory of youth helping youth. No one was doing anything about street kids in Ottawa, so we did something for each other. We helped so many kids get off the street and into their own apartments.

I had become much more street oriented than before. My jeans would get dirty and I wore the same socks for two or three days in a row. I wouldn't shower for a couple of days either. I wore my toque and my poncho, and I panhandled. A couple of times when our camp needed fuel for the heaters, I prostituted myself again. I was seventeen and still hustling.

Franklin and I had really become distant from each other. I was pretty gross at that point in my life. I wasn't taking care of myself, inside or outside. I was helping all these other people and not doing anything for myself. When the camp ended, I went to the hospital because I thought I was losing my mind.

Once I regained my health, I was hired by a student's group who travelled across Canada speaking out about violence and social justice issues. I started talking about my experiences being gay, homeless, and an addict to as many as fifteen-hundred students at a time. I travelled across Eastern Canada doing that until the fall. I continued becoming more comfortable with being gay.

I was proud to be gay, and I was very happy. I believe the more comfortable I am with my sexuality, the more other people will be with theirs. We need to start talking about sexuality issues, including lesbigay teen issues. That's the only way our healing is going to start, inside ourselves and outside as well.

At eighteen, I moved to Vancouver and worked for an environmental organization. I began to totally identify with the gay area there. It was amazing to be in a place where I could be me and feel safe. I lived with Les, a guy who I had started seeing in Ottawa. He was totally cute and loveable. The relationship didn't work out very well and he later moved to New Brunswick. I was really hurt because this had been my first equitable gay relationship.

At that point in my life, I realized that I wasn't going to walk into a bar and have all the men love me. When I was fifteen or sixteen, I could walk into any bar and have any man I wanted. When I walked into a bar inVancouver, no one noticed me. I had to wait in line and pay the cover charge like everyone else. I was not the prize anymore. Being in Vancouver was definitely not a confidence booster.

I moved to Calgary in September 1994 and I got a job working with street kids. This is when my healing really started. I stopped drinking and I stopped smoking drugs. I have now abstained for over a year-and-a-half.

Since I've lived in Calgary, I've had a couple of longer relationships. Longer means several months -- one was five months and the other was eight months. I'm twenty-two now and although I'm attracted to people physically who are my age, that's where it stops. I'm not into the bar scene anymore and I'm into much into one night stands either. I'm mentally attracted to people who are in their late twenties. I try to date people my age, but I'm just not into them. I get frustrated in Calgary being gay because if you want to meet someone here, you've got to frequent the bar. I know there's a lot of social and political groups that you can join, but even they seem work oriented to me, and I don't have the time or energy to go to meetings at night.

I now work fifty to sixty-five hours a week. My job is my priority in life. Relationships I've had since this job haven't been overly successful because I'm not looking for anything intense. I want something very casual, like let's get together once or twice a week, have dinner or whatever, and if it goes farther I'll then reevaluate my life.

Presently I am the executive director of a non-profit agency that works with young people involved with child welfare and the youth justice system. Its mandate is to help youth start their own healing because the department of social services would like to think that you can give a kid a social worker and a therapist and that healing with automatically result. That's not how it works. They've got to be in a space where they want to start healing and where they want to start talking about what happened when they were young and how it makes them feel. We incorporate the theory of youth helping youth. Young people listen to me and take direction from me because I have been there, and I am young. They connect with who I am and what I represent. The most amazing thing is that because I'm comfortable being gay, a number of kids come out to me soon after meeting me. The way I look at it, the more comfortable I am with myself, the more comfortable other people will be with me as well.

I'm very proud of being gay. I'm planning to get a rainbow band tattooed on my arm with the word pride underneath. If I use any label it would be queer. I live a relatively gay lifestyle, I support gay organizations, I shop in gay businesses, I support my community, but it's not in the forefront anymore. No longer do I need to walk down the mall and have people know that I'm gay.

I grew up in this gay world where gay clothing was from Le Chateau or Club Monaco. The clothing style was tight, and now on a Sunday afternoon I don't want to wear a skin tight shirt. I'm at that point where I can do that. I don't need to shave every single day . . . this is who I am. I'm also a youth worker and a vegetarian. These are all parts of who I am.

I would never not want to be gay. There are days when I'm desperately single and I would love to have someone to spend the night with to cuddle and watch a movie. I also have to remember that I am only twenty-two and I don't need to be getting married right now. I have several people that I can date here and there. That's where I'm at now in my life. I'm gay and this is who I am. I'm hopefully going to help young people shape their identity, or at least shape their appreciation for who they are.

In respect to gay young people, I want them to know that it's alright. When a kid tells me that *"I think I might be gay,"* or *"hey, you know I hustled when I was younger,"* I already know it before the kid tells me. I can tell. I can meet a kid and know that within months he'll come to me and say *"Alex, I think I might be gay."*

In my continuing development as a gay man, I am reconsidering what I want out of a relationship. Do I want to commit to someone or continue having these cheesy relationships that aren't going anywhere? I think I need to get into a long-term healthy relationship: one that's based on trust, respect, and understanding. Someone with whom to share and grow together. I think when that occurs, that will be the pinnacle of my gay development. I want to be with a partner. It's the next step.

Being gay is about intimacy and supporting. It's who I love, it's not who I chose to love. I don't know if I've had true love yet. I know I've been in lust and I've thought I've been in love at times. In hindsight, I'm not sure. I know the time is going to come when I'll meet someone and it's going to click. I don't doubt that at all. I'm attracted to men, I enjoy having sex with them, but the intimate part is not there for me with women.

Let me now tell you about some of the positive and negative highlights I've experienced in my gay journey. The gay pride march in New York in 1994 was completely amazing, for example. There were over a million gay people present. Marching in the Toronto Gay Pride Parade has also been exhilarating. Last summer, that parade even had more than a million in attendance. I wasn't there, but I heard the streets were packed. It was the first year that I haven't been involved. I've taken part in pride marches in Vancouver, New York, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, and Halifax. I like to travel, and my goal is now to do the United States. I'm going to migrate to San Francisco for their pride march next year.

On the more negative side, when I attend the pride march in Calgary and see four hundred people marching in the rain, I find it very disheartening. My happiness is geographically-based to some extent. It has nothing to do with who I am really. I get frustrated with the Calgary gay community. In the Calgary Centre riding, gay people should be voting for politicians who are going to make changes for us. I have the impression that either we don't vote, or we just go with the flow. That disgusts me.

There have been times when I've been harassed in the parking lots of gay bars across the country. I've had rocks thrown at me and stuff like that. I have been gay-bashed a couple of times too. The first assault occurred while I was ending a relationship in Ottawa. I was feeling very emotional and I thought eating some pizza might make me feel better. The pizza joint was closed, so I asked this guy standing outside when they closed and he looked at me and said *"I don't know."* I was wearing a button that said *"boycott homophobia,"* and he noticed it. He uttered to me, *"what are you, a homosexual, or just a plain faggot?"* I replied, *"fuck you!"* He stood up and hit me. This guy was big, but I beat him up right there. The final act was scraping his face across the corner of the brick building, just enough so it was all scraped and some blood was oozing. As I left, I said *"you've had your ass kicked by a faggot."* I walked away feeling good. I saw him a week later with his friends, and I was worried that he would kill me. Instead, he just walked by me and looked away.

The second assault occurred five months ago. I was walking out of a straight pool hall on first street in Calgary, accompanied by a straight male friend and his girlfriend. Three drunk young guys, probably eighteen to twenty, were in front of us. One of them turned around and said to my female friend, *"are you looking at my ass?"* She replied, *"no, to be very honest I wasn't."* He retorted *"oh, you fucking dyke,"* and then the three of them started chiming *"dyke, dyke, dyke."* We left and headed toward a nearby gay bar. By the time we arrived, these same three guys were hitting a guy with pipes who was just leaving the bar. I got out of our vehicle and said *"hey guys, what's going on?"* They all stood up, ready to fight. I convinced them to walk away, but one of them looked back at my male friend and asked *"what did you say?"* He hadn't said a thing. This hoodlum was about to hit my friend in the head with the pipe when I moved in to help. I grabbed his wrist and removed the pipe. Before leaving with his friends, he sucker punched me on the side of my face.

One of my saddest memories is thinking about the many people who have failed me in my life. When I called out for help, the education system didn't do anything. I actually ran into that principal two weeks ago when I was at a conference in Ottawa. There were fifteen hundred people at this luncheon, and I ended up sitting at the table next to her. In front of probably eighteen people who were listening, I told her *"you need to be aware of what you did by ignoring the abuse that happened. You need to know the pain that I went through because you chose to ignore it."* She started to cry, and I felt badly for her. That happened, after all, in the eighties. That was yesterday.

October 22, 1997

I received a reply from my mailout to Alex today. He made a few editorial changes and enclosed a letter dated October 17, 1997. Here are a few of its highlights:

> *"Reading your cover piece on 'Alex,' I understand I can be somewhat a goof occasionally. My 'avoidance behavior' can be attributed to not really wanting to talk to you at that point in my life. But you were right though: it wasn't you, just more the conversation."*

Alex had returned to a life of drugs and alcohol. Once again finding the strength to become "clean," he continues to struggle in making sense of his past. Yesterday is not easily forgotten. Nor has it been for any of us.

. . . but we do have today and tomorrow to look forward to as positive gay men. Our gay identity is no longer easily suppressed.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Deriving Meaning From Our Experience

Genesis 1:31 And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.
(New American Standard Master Study Bible, 1981, p. 4).

I am a child of God and God doesn't make junk.
(quoted from a gay man in Kus, 1988, p. 33).

Introduction to the Composite Depiction

Regarding methodology, I remind the reader that the manner in which I analyzed the transcripts went beyond the usual heuristic process. I followed a more systematic approach, typical of phenomenological research, to help ensure the richness and thoroughness of the emerging themes. Heuristics differs from phenomenological research, however, in that:

> . . . . (2) Whereas phenomenology permits the researcher to conclude with definitive descriptions of the structures of experience, heuristics leads to depiction of essential meanings and portrayal of the intrigue and personal significance that imbue the search to know. (3) Whereas phenomenological research generally concludes with a presentation of the distilled structures of experience, heuristics may involve reintegration of derived knowledge that itself is an act of creative discovery, a synthesis that includes intuition and tacit understanding. (4) Whereas phenomenology loses the persons in the process of descriptive analysis, in heuristics the research participants remain visible in the examination of the data and continue to be portrayed as whole persons. Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43).

A heuristic study is more concerned with synthesis than analysis, and the task of the heuristic inquirer is to convey understanding through two means: the composite depiction and the creative synthesis.

As I explained in chapter three, the composite depiction contains all of the themes and meanings discovered as reflected in the experience of the primary researcher and the co-researchers. Its intent is to be comprehensive and generic (Moustakas, 1990). To help ensure its thoroughness and validity, I referred to the themes and categories extracted from the coding procedure (see appendix G) and the tabulated results from the Themes Questionnaire (see appendix H). Although the composite was guided by my understanding of three phases of building a positive gay identity (i.e., before coming out, coming out, and establishing a positive gay identity), the depiction is reported here in the heuristic style.

My dissertation began with the research question, *"What is the experience of men who construct and integrate a positive gay identity?"* Here is what I have come to understand:

The Composite Depiction

Constructing and integrating a positive gay identity is complex and multifaceted. My co-researchers and I have not arrived at the same place. That hasn't been our goal either. Being gay is about being unique. We are individuals, and we want to stay that way. Most of us have fought stereotypes all our lives. We are sick of them.

Broadly speaking, we have all gone through three phases of development: our experiences before coming out to ourselves, the coming out period itself, and our experiences that helped us establish positive gay identities.

Before coming out, we suffer varying degrees of conflict. The war inside can feel like mortal combat. It is our humanness that is at stake. So many things inform us that we are different (i.e., the *catalysts*), yet so many things block our awareness and acceptance (i.e., the *hindrances*).

The catalysts pry our eyes open. A developing awareness of being gay and gay culture emerges while our sexual orientation manifests itself. When our vision is clear, we are very aware that we feel different from heterosexual men. Our sexual fantasies and dreams draw our attention to homoeroticism. Our arousal and attraction toward men is strong, and if we have the inner strength and opportunity during this early period, some of us experience sexual acts with another guy. Even without this chance, however, we are informed by our feelings. Falling in love and feeling pangs of infatuation give us away in our hearts. Many of us have had sexual experiences with women, but something was lacking. Either our enjoyment was compromised, or without exception, our ability to fall deeply in love was thwarted. Few of us understood why early on. That took some deep soul searching and further life experience.

Some of us broached our sexuality from a different angle. The excitement caused by a fetish or a desire to entertain could evoke an interest in leather and/or female drag. If the interest was persistent enough, it would later become integrated into identity.

Eventually, all of us had to begin an inside journey. The questioning and soul searching begged for an answer we could accept. At some level we usually knew what had to be faced, but our hope, like that of our families, was that it would pass. As the inside journey continued, we began our tentative steps outward. Exploring the gay world took us in different directions, and we began wherever it felt safe. Half of us moved to different residences before taking the next step. Nearly half turned to others to help them face what they knew to be true.

While our eyes were being opened, other forces tried to close them again, sometimes so successfully in fact that they stayed closed for many years. The hindrances boil down to one thing: the fear and condemnation of homosexuals, both internally and externally. This demon[21] is named *homophobia*, and it has a life of its own. Beginning at the societal level, it infiltrates the minds of citizens, who inadvertently keep it alive and well. The stereotypes blaspheme us, and the victimization we suffer is cloaked in a veil of silence. Many don't know we exist, but the demon knows, and it comes out whenever the awful silence is broken. Some scramble to make sense of something that makes no sense to them. Others continue to deny that homosexuality exists. Still others lash out verbally or physically, trying to rid the earth symbolically of the demon. The demon they're fighting, of course, is within them.

Unfortunately, very unfortunately, the demon has even entered the minds of those who are trying to come out. Nearly all of us have fought to overcome internalized homophobia, which is our own fear and hatred of ourselves. Raised to believe that we are sinners, religious and societal guilt is buried deep in our psyches. The desire to run is strong, and many do. While the frantic running continues, our self-esteem suffers. We try hard to minimize our feelings, and sometimes we are so good at it that we deny who we are for years or decades. Our presentation to others is that we are heterosexuals, and half of us managed to hold back our feelings by focusing our energies on other things. During this charade, it's not uncommon that we become extremely productive and work ourselves into the ground. After all, we don't love ourselves all that much. A symbolic death is perhaps the best we can muster.

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[21] AUTHOR NOTE: Use of the word *demon* here is my personification of homophobia.

Half of us have suffered consequences as a direct result of our denial. Examples include becoming unhappy and depressed while feeling like an imposter or a fake. Occasionally, this leads to self-destructive acts.

Depending on our circumstances, other influences can either act as catalysts or hindrances. A loving family can do a lot for a gay person, and an unaccepting one can do damage. Unconditional love is taxed when a gay person comes out. If it's real, however, it soon shows itself. The church's hold on some of us was detrimental. According to some church doctrines, God offers only conditional love to humans. It took a lot of courage for my co-researchers to challenge this dogma. Some still struggle with it.

Over half of us were affected by what our friends thought of us. Their influence too could go either way. Mostly, they were helpful. Thank God for loving friends. Other cultural influences could seriously hamper a co-researcher's ability to come out. For example, some Asian cultures have beliefs that are strongly opposed to gay people. Overall, our own Canadian society has not been very supportive either. In Alberta, we still do not have equal protection under human rights legislation.

Deep in the psyche lies the seed of hope, and sooner or later we questioned our indoctrination into prejudice. Before a flame extinguishes, one last breath needs to be exhaled. If the breath is delicate enough, instead of blowing out, the candle burns with even greater intensity. Our flame began burning brightly as our spirits began making sense of the nonsense.

Eventually we were ready for our debut. Coming out to ourselves was the name of our debut, the next phase of our development. A new way of looking at life and living it was emerging.

Half of us began to acknowledge we were gay after experiencing some type of turning point or crisis. The intensity varied, but it could lead the sane of mind to seriously contemplate suicide. Three quarters of us experienced intense, negative emotions during our self-identification process. Guilt, anxiety, anger, embarrassment, and depression were common. Such emotions could drive us to the depths of despair. Fortunately, another cluster of emotions was experienced by nearly all of us. Along with the agony came a new-found joy. Ironically, the feeling of relief, exhilaration, and euphoria could seem equally as overwhelming. We were not suffering from a mental illness like once believed in the past . . . instead, we were reclaiming ourselves.

This was not an easy task. The hindrances kept reminding us of the demon, and it kept haunting us in many forms. It created doubt, and doubt could summon forth the defense of denial in an instant. We were already experts at its use. While our emotions danced around in circles, our inner beliefs were metamorphizing. Reducing internalized homophobia meant correcting our own faulty stereotypes about gay people. Beyond these changes, many of us also needed to look deeper at what it meant to be gay. Our innermost beliefs, held dear to our hearts, had to evolve.

Approximately half of us needed to learn the gay role. Without having positive gay role models, we watched, we read, and we listened. We learned how to act sexually and non-sexually with other gay men.

The little bird who cracks open its shell cannot reenter it. We cannot go back either. When enough progress has been made in (1) accepting the gay label; (2) learning the gay role; (3) working through the emotions; (4) reducing internalized homophobia; and (5) becoming certain, the next evolutionary step becomes possible. Not all gay men seem able to go there, however. It speaks multitudes about the difficulty of truly breaking free of homophobia.

Beyond these initial steps taken to self-identify as gay, another phase of development was underway for my co-researchers and I. Without necessarily realizing that it was occurring, we continued our growth as gay individuals. We began making movement toward establishing a positive gay identity. To reiterate, we were not all headed toward the same destination. We are unique, and part of our growth has been recognizing the complexities of gay identity, and learning to accept the differences that exist in our community. Overall, however, it seems that to become a positive gay individual, three processes which lead to the development of a gay identity needed to become integrated: connecting with self, connecting with the gay world, and reconnecting with the straight world.

The first process included further changes occurring within our minds. We had to overcome the internal and external oppression which the demon launched against us. All of us viewed our experience as essential to becoming free and liberated. Most of us saw our transformation as giving us the opportunity to become authentic human beings. The threads of our personality became woven into a solid braid as we became whole and complete for the first time. The demon's final demise occurred when fear, hatred, and guilt were replaced with self-love. Self-acceptance became its hallmark, with feeling positive about being gay as its corollary.

With enough of the internal work accomplished, a strength of character developed that allowed us to stand up for our beliefs. Our uniqueness would no longer be suppressed. We could now challenge individuals and society itself with their own demon, one with which we were all too familiar.

The second process leading to integration was our connection with the gay world. We all sought involvement in the gay community by attending gay events, frequenting gay venues, and/or by spending time with gay people. Half of us began this aspect of our journey by strongly identifying with the gay community, and allowing it to define who we were as gay men. Some experienced this as becoming saturated by the gay scene. The gay bar, the gay clubs and organizations, the gay-frequented or owned restaurants, and gay friendships became consuming. For most, this level of involvement in the gay subculture diminished over time.

More than half of us developed a sense of pride in being gay, with a concurrent desire to celebrate our gay identities. This is exemplified internally by preferring to be gay as compared to straight, and externally by attending gay events like pride marches.

Another way that we connect to the gay world is through intimate relationships. Three quarters of us either desire or are in a partnership with another gay male. Nearly all of us have had the experience of falling in love with a male in the past, and a third of us are currently in love with someone.

Beyond fulfilling our own needs, my co-researchers and I have developed an altruistic spirit, often expressed as a desire to "give something back" to the gay community. Our own healing has taken years, and through this we have developed an empathy for others who still need to do the same. Aptly described by one co-researcher, we want to act as "Ambassadors of Change" for the gay community. Through its many forms -- doing volunteer work, befriending those who need our help, or offering money to gay causes, for example -- we aim to make a difference. We try to give voice to those whose voice has been shattered or silenced.

Despite how well we put ourselves together and made inroads in the gay community, we were not living on a gay island removed from civilization. The third process requiring integration was our reconnection with the straight world. We, like you, had already been exposed to the straight world, and perhaps overexposed. We already knew so much about the straight world that during our coming out, many of us had to temporarily abandon it to break its pervasive hold on us. Our return to mainstream society is never quite the same as we experienced during our initial indoctrination. We have changed.

We are constantly challenged in deciding to whom we wish to disclose. One co-researcher described this as our second "coming out," and we never complete this process as there are always new people entering our lives. Most of us have felt that disclosing to others has been helpful in our development of a positive gay identity. It would be inaccurate to report that this has occurred without negative consequences. Tragically, 40 percent of us have experienced discrimination, harassment, or even violence because of being identified as visibly gay. Nonetheless, most of us are unwilling to hide anymore, despite the suffering we may need to endure. What we find hard to understand is why we need to suffer at all. We're beautiful people too.

Disclosing to family and attempting to work through the shock and trauma that often occurs has also been an important part of building a positive gay identity. Family relationships are often strained for a time. Some parents continue to hold homophobic attitudes while struggling to accept their gay son. Thankfully, most are eventually able to break the demon's hold on them as well. Unconditional love knows no demons.

We all need to find ways to manage the stigma of being gay. Its consequences can be life threatening. It takes a lot of courage to be gay. This, perhaps more than any other trait, underlies the development of a positive gay identity.

The integration of positive gay identity is complete when the self, the gay world, and the straight world are consolidated into one's personal identity. The fusion of these three components creates a unique template for each of us. Embedded somewhere is our belief in the basic equality and worth of each person, and each person's journey. After all, we are individuals, and we want to stay that way. Most of us have fought stereotypes all our lives. Perhaps more than ever, we remain sick of them.

Introduction to the Creative Synthesis

As I wrote in chapter three, the creative synthesis is the hallmark of the heuristic journey: the end is more than the sum of its parts. It can take many artistic forms (eg., song, poem, metaphorical tale), but most commonly is presented as a narrative description. Whereas other qualitative methodologies end at something akin to the composite depiction, which is a comprehensive and generic integration of themes and meanings, the heuristic inquiry goes one further step by taking the researcher back into self. Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p. 52) suggested that the synthesis is not a "summary or recapitulation." The creative synthesis brings back the "I," the subjective "me" that has gone through the journey of exploring this phenomenon from start to finish. The synthesis reflects the impact.

The creative synthesis is a series of three pieces entitled *Letters to Dad*. Although these letters include concepts that hold deep significance for me, they are not letters to *my* own father. Instead, they reflect my integration of the experience. Embedded within the creative synthesis is *my* uniqueness, not *my* relationship to my own father.

The Creative Synthesis: "Letters to Dad"

First Letter.

Dear Dad,

Forgive me for not writing to you sooner. You've been away for a long time and sometimes I forget that you are still out there. I've got to tell you what has been happening. I think I am in serious trouble.

I don't know what's wrong and I don't know who to turn to. I feel like I've been doing hard time[22] *for years without understanding why. You and I have never been that close and I'm not sure writing this letter to you will help. The truth is, I need a father more than ever now. Why is it you seem so distant?*

From since I was very young, it seemed that you reacted to me as if I was different. I didn't enjoy sports and athletics like most other boys. My gentle spirit was misunderstood. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I think you were disappointed in me. I fear that you still are.

The truth is, I've had no one to talk to about my feelings. At times it has felt like solitary confinement. You see, I've known for a long time that I ***am*** *different, but I hate that about myself. I want to fit in with the other boys too. Dad, have you ever felt that no matter how hard you tried, you just couldn't cut it, or that others just wouldn't accept you? That's how I've felt. I am more scared than you could imagine.*

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[22] *Doing hard time* is the vernacular term used by offenders to describe the time they serve in a remand centre awaiting court and possible sentencing. This period is experienced by most offenders as very stressful emotionally.

My mind feeds me images, thoughts, fantasies, and dreams that hurt my self-image and self-concept. More than that, I am aware that I am sexually attracted to and aroused by other guys. The feelings are so overwhelming at times that I can hardly think straight. I know these feelings are wrong, and I am trying hard to suppress them. You can't imagine the guilt, Dad. I hate that part of me. I think I hate myself.

At times I've thought I will be okay. I've had some dates with women, and it was not as bad as I had imagined. They make great friends. I've even had sex with a few of them now, and sex is alright. Orgasm produces a wonderful feeling. I've begun working very hard at school and I hardly have time to think about sex or any type of serious dating. I didn't think I could face what my insides were telling me.

I have had to, however. The feelings won't go away. I have been doing a lot of soul searching and learning. I am learning about gay people, Dad, and although a lot of it scares me, a lot of it doesn't. I've even met some gay men who seem like really nice guys. I'm not sure yet what I am going to do with all of this information. Perhaps falling in love with a woman is still in the cards for me.

Second Letter.

Dear Dad,

I must be losing the poker hand . . . my heart is not going out to women at all. However, since I last wrote you, I have begun to see that my heart has been going out to men for a very long time. I now have some shocking news to report to you so I want you to brace yourself. ***Dad, I am gay.*** *I never thought I could utter those words concerning myself, particularly not to you. My only saving grace is that you are so far away that your reaction won't hurt me as bad.*

Don't let me give you the impression that this has been easy. This has been the most difficult experience of my life. Especially soon after labelling myself as gay I found myself frequently vacillating back and forth and still expecting that something would cast this spell from me. Now I know it's not a spell. My sexual orientation has been stable ever since I can remember. The only instability was my reaction to it.

The emotional roller coaster that has resulted since coming out to myself has taken me from the depths of despair to the heights of elation. Sometimes my lows have prompted me to contemplate suicide. Sometimes a few hours later, my highs have made me feel strong and *empowered. I don't know how much of this I can endure. I still periodically ask myself what about me is so wrong. Furthermore, what have I done that is so wrong? Intellectually I don't think there is very much wrong about this part of me, but emotionally may be a different story. I really can't seem to make proper sense of it.*

I no longer think that gay people are all this, or all that. There are a lot of different types out there, but I wouldn't say that I accept all of them. Some still strike me as very unusual or even weird. I don't know where I fit in to the gay community, Dad. I am scared to tell very many people about this part of me. I know most people won't want to hear it. A lot of times I don't like to hear it either. However, I don't think there is much I can do to change it.

I've started learning about what it means to be gay. The first time a man with a five o'clock shadow embraced me, I couldn't believe the roughness on my skin. A guy once kissed me in public and I thought I would die from embarrassment. These sorts of experiences take some getting used to. I've also learned a new style of humor and new ways to relate to and act with other men. It's like becoming part of a new culture. I wonder if all of this will ever feel completely right. Most of me hopes so, but part of me is unsure.

Third Letter.

Dear Dad,

Exciting things are beginning to happen for me, Dad. Lots of changes are occurring inside. I have never felt so free before. The self loathing has dissipated and I can now see the rainbow. Frankly, I have never felt so positive. My inner self tells me that I am definitely gay and I have completely transcended my earlier misgivings about it. For the first time I can say I truly love myself. As a gay man, I believe I am equal to all people. I accept myself as I am. By being who I am, I now embrace a sense of wholeness and authenticity. I now understand Shakespeare's famous quote, "To Thine Own Self Be True." I used to feel like an imposter, and in many ways I once acted like one. A strong sense of integrity has become very important to me.

My growth has given me an inner strength I never knew existed. I find I can now think for myself and stand up for my beliefs. That's why there is no hesitation in sending you this letter, Dad. The last two were difficult to send because of the intensity of my struggle. The struggle has now changed in form entirely.

Dad, gay individuals have been treated unfairly since the beginning of time. Still, many people do not realize how much we've been hurt. I'm not doing hard time anymore. In fact, I don't understand why I ever had to do it in the first place. I have committed no crime. At last, I am filled with a passion that I can express in many ways. I can now experience genuine, consummate love with another, for example. I have become a person.

For my own replenishment and enrichment, and as a way of giving something back, I maintain involvement in the gay community. Most of my friends are also involved, and I am proud of them. They give freely of their time, their energy, and their money. They are trying to help other gay people, and some are reaching further to help foster a positive influence at the societal level. They are ambassadors of change. There are many ways to celebrate our gayness, and I look forward to creating and attending many of these opportunities.

I have learned to become accepting of the great diversity in our community. In retrospect, I think every time I failed to accept another gay person, I was actually failing to accept something within my own nature. We are all comprised of many traits to greater and lesser extents.

I've also experienced a homecoming, Dad, only home has changed since I was away. I have disclosed to a number of straight people: friends, family, and others. Some people refuse to acknowledge or accept me as I am. It especially hurts when the rejection comes from someone who was once close. I have learned to be discerning about whom I tell. Most of my friends have not lost any real friends through their disclosures, and most of their families have adjusted with time. I am hoping that you will adjust too, Dad. I don't get to choose my family any more or less than I get to choose my sexual orientation. I need you, all of you, to be a part of my world. I was, and still am, a part of yours.

I don't know if you realize how much courage it took for me to get here. At least in that, I hope you will be proud that I learned to stand up for who I am. Some of my friends have been bashed for being who they are. You know, we could sure use all the help we can in fighting back. Mostly, I just think people need help in understanding us. We're not really all that much different from them.

The petal of my gayness has now found its place amongst the other petals that define me. My flower has been enriched by my experience. I hope you have come to understand that flowers come in many varieties and colors. When they're arranged together, they're more beautiful than when they stand alone.

P.S. I now realize that it's me who has been away for a long time. You were there all along. I just needed to write these letters honestly and deliver them. Although I would have preferred to have sent them sooner, I needed first to be ready. After all, this was no small journey.

CHAPTER SIX:

Weaving Together the Threads of Identity

> *Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery.*
>
> *Polanyi (1962, cited in Moustakas, 1990, p. 56)*

Summary

Knowing that I wanted to research some aspect of gay identity, I began by reading many articles and books about gay people. With my personal experiences and observations of others, I concluded that there was insufficient information available about what constitutes a positive gay identity. As I explored possible methodologies, I found heuristics was most congruent with my *self* and with what I ideally wanted to accomplish and come to understand. The resulting research question became *"what is the experience of men who construct and integrate a positive gay identity?"*

There are six phases of heuristic methodology, and by crystallizing my research question, I completed the *initial engagement* phase. The *immersion* into my topic transpired at various points throughout my research. The most salient occasions occurred during (1) my sojourn to the Rocky Mountains; (2) the time the interviews were conducted; (3) the coding of transcripts and compilation/organization of the themes; and (4) the period of extensive reading before writing the literature review.

In total, I interviewed 15 gay men and one gay adolescent, aged 15 to 62. Each of them self-identified as gay and reported having a positive gay identity. Results from the Sexual Orientation Questionnaire (Appendix A, enclosure III) indicated that each co-researcher had very strong homosexual inclinations, based on sexual fantasies, behavior, affect, and preference for male sexual partners.

After completing the interviews, I began my first period of *incubation* (i.e., the third phase of heuristics). I focused my energies on other things for nearly six months, from which point I wrote narratives for the co-researchers and coded their transcripts. I also organized the themes into an initial set of categories. This was followed by a second incubation period whereupon I began preparation for my literature review. A couple of months later I revised the categorical structure of the themes after the *illumination* occurred (i.e., the fourth heuristic phase). The fifth phase of heuristic inquiry, the *explication*, occurred when I prepared for and wrote the composite depiction, and the sixth step was the achievement of the *creative synthesis*.

The findings of my research suggested that gay men experience a great deal of intrapsychic and interpsychic conflict before coming out to themselves. I conceptualized the conflict as a struggle between catalysts, which inform gay males that they are gay, and hindrances, which serve to suppress these affirming messages. The hindrances categorically fit under one heading, which I labelled *Fear and Condemnation of Homosexuals*. The catalysts I labelled *Developing an Increased Awareness of Being Gay and Gay Culture*. Four influences were also described which could either serve as catalysts or hindrances. These involved parental/familial, cultural or church, peer, and societal influences.

During the period when a gay male comes out to himself (i.e., self-identifies as gay), many positive and negative emotions are experienced. The emotional upheaval occurs in conjunction with beliefs that begin to change. New behaviors, especially roles, need to be learned as well. As the internalized homophobia weakens, the individual can become increasingly certain that he is gay. These changes build the foundation for a gay identity. The construction of a *positive* gay identity requires additional work, however.

Further changes occur at the intrapsychic level. The gay man begins to embrace self-love. This is accomplished by developing a positive view of being gay, feeling good about this label, and enjoying increased levels of self-acceptance. Aside from self-love, the positive gay man feels a sense of wholeness and authenticity. As the inner work continues, a personal power emerges when the timing is right. Strength of character, autonomous thinking, and standing up for one's beliefs become evident.

At the interpsychic level, the positive gay man finds ways to connect with the gay world. The involvement in the gay community may be peripheral, or it may become very important. There is often a sense of pride in being gay and a concomitant desire to celebrate one's gayness. The desire to connect opens the floodgates of desire for intimacy, and most pursue it. Positive gay men also want to give something back to other gay people. This altruistic desire leads most on a path toward becoming "ambassadors" of change.

The final step, which often occurs concurrently with the other two, are the many ways that one learns to reconnect and cope with the generally homophobic straight community.

Disclosing to others and dealing with family are often challenging acts. So are the many ways one learns to manage the stigma and the potential consequences of being gay in a largely straight world.

The resolution of a positive gay identity leads eventually to an integration of the three worlds of self, gay, and straight. Its final consolidation will not be the same for any two individuals. That's probably because they are, after all, individuals. Becoming a positive gay man is about one's unique way of constructing a viable, healthy identity.

Possible Limitations of My Study

There are a number of potential limitations inherent within any qualitative methodology, and here I will address those that may have had an impact in my study. Grumeretz (1995) reported four possible limitations that Clark Moustakas outlined regarding heuristics:

> (1) A co-researcher may tell you what you expect to hear, or what he or she believes is a social expectancy. (2) Important meanings can register in silence, and are essential to a full understanding of an experience. Journals, drawings, and personal notes may be used to lessen obstacles to a true knowledge of an experience. (3) The same depth of information will not be obtained from every participant. Not all participants will be equally articulate, cooperative or comprehensive. (4) A way of circumventing the limits and establishing validity of heuristic data is to share the depiction of the experience (based on the recorded interview) with the co-researcher and have it confirmed or modified so that it is consistent with the co-researcher's perception of the meaning and essence of the experience (p. 52).

The first point concerns the potential for experimenter bias, which is sometimes called the "Pygamlion Effect" (Christmas, 1991, p. 141). This effect refers to the possibility that an experimenter will "hear what he or she wants to hear," or "see what he or she wants to see." This effect is demonstrated when subjects in an investigation provide the experimenter with the expected outcome (i.e., the hypothesized result). Qualitative research is different in that there are no preconceived hypotheses. In my study, I attempted to avoid having a preconceived notion of what the themes and categories might look like. Without having predetermined hypotheses, I was not looking for a particular result. Additional safeguards I built into my study were as follows:

1. During the interviews, I established a good rapport with each co-researcher and an atmosphere of acceptance. I believe that they felt comfortable to share their story as they perceived it to be, not as I wanted to hear it.
2. Each interview began with the same general question, and I probed as needed to get a comprehensive picture of each co-researcher's experience. Although each co-researcher was provided a list of sample questions before the interview (see appendix A, enclosure V), the interview itself proceeded in an informal conversational style until near the end. The probing was intended to help each co-researcher take a deeper look at his experience from his own frame of reference. In instances where I provided a summary of what I heard and it was incorrect, co-researchers were quick to correct me. My perception was that I was not told what I wanted to hear.
3. In the analysis, few themes were experienced by everyone. If an experimenter bias was occurring, greater communality would have likely occurred.

The second possible limitation concerns the possibility that important meanings may not be articulated, or missed in the analysis. I chose co-researchers who were articulate. With myself as primary researcher and 16 co-researchers, it is unlikely that important themes would not have been expressed or considered. Regarding my analysis, it was very thorough and detailed. I feel confident that important themes were not missed.

The third potential limitation concerns the cooperativeness, comprehensiveness, and verbal ability of each co-researcher. Indeed, not all of my co-researchers were equally articulate. However, I did screen each co-researcher for their ability to speak clearly about this topic. Each co-researcher freely chose to take part in my study, and most expressed a feeling of being honored to participate. Consequently, they were all very cooperative. Furthermore, all co-researchers returned their narratives to me that I drafted after making their own revisions. They also returned the completed Themes Questionnaire, which further demonstrated their cooperativeness. Comprehensiveness is best accomplished by continuing to interview co-researchers until the point of saturation (see methodology chapter), which I did.

The fourth point regarding limitations concerns the validity of each individual's depiction (i.e., narrative). As recommended, each co-researcher revised his story to ensure accuracy and an adequate degree of confidentiality. Regarding accuracy, few changes needed to be made in the revisal of the narratives. To ensure adequate confidentiality, all changes requested by co-researchers were honored. This usually entailed changes in biographical content (e.g., place of birth, names of places, group affiliations). Completion of the Themes Questionnaire by each co-researcher provided a quantitative means of ensuring the accuracy and extent of generalizability[23] of the themes in preparation for writing the composite depiction.

McCormack (1994, p. 138) wrote that "Heuristic research is not replicateable. It is subjective and idiosyncratic." Co-researchers are not randomly selected[24], for example, but are instead chosen. My selection of co-researchers was influenced by their availability. It is possible that another group of 17 gay males would have a different experience in their development of a positive gay identity. As I interviewed the 16 co-researchers, however, I found that a limited number of themes emerged which were repeated over and over again by different individuals. The point of saturation was reached only after actively looking for individuals who represented different facets of the gay community. The result is a sample of positive gay men who comprise a diverse group of individuals across many criteria: age range, socioeconomic status, race, color, religion, general mental health, and gay subcultural allegiance. I believe that the comprehensiveness of my work minimizes the possibility that the themes that emerged are non-representative.

Perhaps of greater importance is that even if these themes are only applicable to my sample, they represent the 17 people involved in my research. My primary purpose was to study the personal and autobiographical aspects of people's experience.

Another possible limitation that Christmas (1991) addressed in her dissertation was whether or not she had answered her research question, or whether she had answered something else. I will ask the same question of my research.

The validity of my study was enhanced through the methodology followed, the careful attention to coding and analysis, and the feedback from co-researchers as to the accuracy of their stories and the themes. Beyond this inductive approach to demonstrating the validity of my research, I now return to the published literature for confirmatory evidence.

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[23] I am referring here to generalizability *within* the sample of co-researchers and myself.

[24] You may recall from the literature review that there has never been a random sample of the gay population as it remains largely invisible.

Comparison of Findings with Prior Research

In writing this section, I have referred to appendix G (i.e., The Themes and Categories) and followed its sequence. Beginning with hindrances, every theorist and nearly every researcher has commented on the effect that the fear and condemnation of homosexuals has had in gay people's identity development. Homophobia and heterosexist thinking is endemic in our society (Slater, 1988), and there is a plethora of documentation which indicates that internalized homophobia profoundly influences the psychological well-being of gay people (Fassinger, 1991). Internalized homophobia is implicated in a number of related difficulties, including development of a negative self-concept and diminished self-esteem (Barrows & Halgin, 1988), "guilt, shame, problems with intimacy, sexual dysfunction, or substance abuse . . . " (p. 396).

Before coming out, gay people come to rely on a number of defense mechanisms to avoid the anxiety caused by their sexual orientation, which they and others perceive as deviant. The defenses implicated are rationalization (A. Martin, 1982; Coleman, 1981-82), denial (Clark, 1997; Gonsiorek, 1993; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Malyon, 1982a, 1982b; Coleman, 1981-82; de Monteflorez & Schultz, 1978), repression (Coleman, 1981-82), reaction formation (Gonsiorek, 1993: Coleman, 1981-82), avoidance (Gonsiorek, 1993), sublimation (Coleman, 1981-82), and compartmentalization of sexual desire (Malyon, 1982a), all of which lead to fragmentation of identity. Overcompensation or distraction, often exemplified by perfectionism with work assignments or compulsive workaholism, is not uncommon either (Isay, 1996).

Self-hatred and self-recrimination find many ways to express themselves. Another form it may take is what I call *heterofacsimile*, which is a gay persons deep desire and attempt to be straight. Examples from my research include attempting to be heterosexual (myself and 10 co-researchers). Some of us tried so hard that we married and in some instances had children. The literature is abundant with attempts, through reparative therapy, for deliverance from homosexual desire (Haldeman, 1994; Murphy, 1992). Also abundantly clear is how unsuccessful such attempts are.

Minimization by others was reported by myself and eight of the co-researchers. This was often expressed by family members and professionals alike that a gay male's feelings and attractions were "just a phase." The minimization was also expressed in the code of silence that has been so prevalent throughout our society (Fassinger, 1991; Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1989; Rofes, 1989; A. Martin, 1982; Beane, 1981; Dank, 1971). Namely, society in general has not wanted to talk about homosexuals or acknowledge that they exist. The media, until recently, has largely ignored the gay population (Olson & King, 1995). This has made it difficult for gay individuals to find positive gay role models (Kottman, Lingg, & Tisdell, 1995; Rotheram-Borus & Fernandez, 1995). At the familial level, parents often do not wish to talk to their sons about their gayness (expressed by a number of co-researchers). The silence has led to the gay community being described by many writers as an "invisible minority" (e.g., Fassinger, 1991; Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1989; A. Martin, 1982).

The silence and the minimization by others lead to another theme under the category of hindrances, that of isolation and rejection. This is a common problem for gay adolescents (Kottman, Lingg, & Tisdell, 1995; Telljohann, Price, Poureslami, & Easton, 1995; Russell, 1989), and 67% of my research sample experienced it for themselves. Being different has resulted in huge consequences for gay men.

Juxtaposed with the hindrances are the catalysts that inform gay men of their sexual orientation and eventual self-definition as gay. Ninety-three percent of my sample felt different from a young age, and the research clearly supports this experience (Beard & Glickauf-Hughes, 1994; Friedman & Downey, 1994; Beane, 1981; Troiden, 1979). Many gay males are aware of their attractions to other males from a young age as well (Isay, 1988; Slater, 1988).

Under catalysts, I have surmised three categories. A *growing awareness of sexual orientation* includes all of the indicators that lead gay men to become aware that they are sexually different from heterosexuals. These are what constitute sexual orientation, and they were previously described in the literature review.

The second category I entitled *"the inside journey"* to denote the questioning and soul searching required to break free from the hindrances and move onto the next stage of coming out. Shallenberger (1996) highlighted this process of questioning in his sample of gay men and lesbian women in resolving their sexuality and spirituality. The questioning step is imbedded within the developmental theories of gay identity development as well. It is often the cognitive task that propels the individual to the next stage of development.

The third category I entitled *"the outside journey."* This represents the exploration stage described in Coleman's (1981-82) theory. Eighty percent of my sample said they explored some aspects of gay life before coming out. According to symbolic interactionism theory, everyone would have needed exposure to gay images or gay people before they could come to identity as gay. In fact, Troiden (1979, p. 368) reported that "meeting other gay men was the common circumstance leading to homosexual self-definition." Subsumed with this category were two themes of relocation and pursuing external validation. Half my sample moved to a different residence to facilitate their coming out, and nearly half turned to others to help them decide if they were gay. De Monteflorez and Schultz (1978) described the importance of validation from others. Hammersmith and Weinberg (1973) reached the same conclusion in their writing about gay people from a symbolic interactionist perspective.

Four themes that emerged from my data were influences that could either serve as catalysts or hindrances for gay men before coming out. These influences include parental/familial, cultural or church, peer, and societal. Some families are better able initially to accept their gay member's disclosure than others, and all of them have to go through their own process of "coming out" and integrating this person's gay identity into the family's identity (Coleman & Remafedi, 1989). Difficulty with parents is one of the most significant problems for many gay individuals (Savin-Williams, 1989). Recent research by Kaufman and Johnson (in press) indicates that one's gay identity development is seriously affected by the reactions of parents and friends.

Regarding the potential influence of church and culture, Fassinger (1991) suggested that much of our current thinking regarding gay people has been negatively influenced by religious views, particularly Christianity. Every one of the 26 participants in Shallenberger's (1996) study pulled away from the churches and synagogues in which they were raised. My co-researchers did the same. Cultural influence varies depending on the culture, but historically "the vast majority of various cultural institutions has argued against the morality of homosexuality" (O'Donohue & Caselles, 1993, p. 191). On the other hand, most North American Natives historically accepted and in some cases revered their individuals who were homosexually inclined (Herdt, 1988; Greenberg, 1985). None of my co-researchers found their culture to be advantageous to their eventual coming out.

The last influence which emerged in my research was from the societal level. In the literature review, I mentioned that Ford and Beach (1951) found that in approximately two-thirds of the societies they studied, homosexuality was not condemned. In some cases, homosexual behavior was even encouraged or expected for males at some point in their development. Unfortunately, our society has not been one of them. Our society continues to express its heterosexism and homophobia.

Eventually I and each of the co-researchers were ready to self-identify as gay. As Hencken and O'Dowd (1977, p. 20) noted, "before one can be(come) something, one must know that something is a possibility." In the past, many gay persons have not had labels for their experience due to the societal silence and minimization about homosexuality. Dank (1971) remarked that most people will need to change the meaning of the term *homosexual* before they can place themselves into that category. This involves reducing internalized homophobia by breaking down the stereotypes and resolving other inner conflicts about being gay (Fassinger, 1991; Barrows & Halgin, 1988; Beane, 1981). Both positive and negative feelings were experienced and needed to be understood (Isay, 1996; Fassinger, 1991; Barrows & Halgin, 1988; Malyon, 1982b). Over half my sample acknowledged that they needed to learn the "gay role," either in the sexual arena or in non-sexual contexts. Stein and Cohen (1984) commented on the experimentation that occurs when gay people come out. Trying out new roles is a common aspect of identity development (Kroger, 1996).

Becoming certain that one is gay is an important step in developing a positive gay identity, and research supports it as leading to better psychological health (Hammersmith & Weinberg, 1973). In my sample, 67% acknowledged that they went through a process of becoming certain.

The development of a positive gay identity seems to begin around this point. Garnets and Kimmel (1993) suggest that most gay men and women go on to develop a positive gay identity. However, Coleman (1981-82) stated that many never reach the highest stage in her theory, called "identity integration." In McDonald's (1982) sample of gay men, 15% stated that they did not consider themselves to have developed a positive gay identity.

In my sample, the establishment of a positive gay identity included making further connections with self, connections with the gay world, and reconnections with the straight world. From within the self grew an increased degree of self-love and self-acceptance. Hershberger and D'Augelli (1995) found that the single largest predictor of mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths was self-acceptance. Leserman, DiSantostefano, Perkins, and Evans (1994) found similar results in their sample of 169 gay men. Walters and Simoni (1993) found that the respondents to their questionnaire who had achieved the highest level of integration had high self-acceptance and good self-esteem scores.

Most of my sample viewed attaining authenticity as an important aspect of developing a positive gay identity. April Martin (1982) argued that the chronic lying to one's self before coming out is damaging to integrity. Malyon (1982a) described it as replacing a false identity for a real one. Related to this is the sense of wholeness that positive gay men develop. Cornett's (1995) main thesis in his book on dynamic psychotherapy for gay men is that they need to become authentic and whole. The fragmented self needs to become integrated (Malyon, 1982a, 1982b).

One hundred percent of my sample felt they had become free or liberated. Those suffering from a negative gay identity are still guilt ridden and do not experience a sense of freedom (Beane, 1981). As their process of self discovery and healing continued, most of my co-researchers and I began to embrace and release our personal power. Patterson (1989, p. 172) wrote that "the self-actualizing person is autonomous, independent, and responsible." The resulting strength of character, and courage, is possibly the most important ingredient in taking the remaining steps to developing a positive gay identity. It provides the fuel for the work that still needs to be done.

Connecting with the gay world is the second major category in this section. Gaining a collective sense of gay identity was reported by nearly 50% of my sample. This refers to gay men feeling that part of their personal identity is defined by the gay community. Cox and Gallois (1996) argued that all individuals in marginalized groups need to develop a group identity and an individual identity. Such a collective identity is fraught with difficulty, however, as it is never clear who has the authority and position to define the components or parameters of such a collective identity (Gamson, 1995).

My entire sample has been involved in the gay community to greater and lesser extents, some to the point of having their lives saturated with such involvement. The research clearly indicates that involvement in the gay community is helpful to gay people's psychological health and functioning (Lesserman, DiSantostefano, Perkins, & Evans, 1994; Walters & Simoni, 1993; D'Augelli, 1991; Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990; Kus, 1988; Minton & McDonald, 1983-84; McDonald, 1982). Social support greatly eases the tension of living in a homophobic world. "Gay bars continue to be the primary (and, in some settings, the only) social outlet for gay men" (Shannon & Woods, 1991, p. 206).

Concomitant with such involvement in the gay community is the development of gay friends. D'Augelli (1991) found that both gay people and supportive straight people were very important to the young gay men in his study. Results from his survey indicated that at least half their friends were gay men and lesbians. The peer group provides the social context for the development of intimacy (Malyon, 1982b). Most of my sample is either in a relationship presently or desires to establish one. In Troiden's (1993) theory, his final stage called *commitment* includes the development of an intimate relationship. Being in relationship with another seems to enhance psychological well-being and one's commitment to a gay identity (Schmitt & Kurdek, 1987; Minton & McDonald, 1983-84).

Another aspect of connecting to the gay world is the desire to celebrate and the feeling of pride in being gay. The importance of gay pride was considered so significant by Cass (1979) that it represents the fifth stage of identity development in her theory. Gay pride and celebration are exemplified by my sample in attendance at gay events, gay marches, and other behaviors that indicate joy in being who we are.

Acting as an ambassador of change is the last theme in this category. Nearly all of my sample is active, or has been active, in giving something back to gay people and the gay community. Some demonstrate incredible altruistic desire to change the way things are for the betterment of all gay individuals. Lee (1977) alluded to some of this desire in describing individuals who had proceeded to the third stage in his model of "going public." The entire gay rights movement was established and continues to advance because of such giving individuals.

The final category is entitled *reconnection with the straight world.* As mentioned in the literature review, a great deal of research and writing has been dedicated to the effects of disclosure on gay identity and psychological health. Generally, the research suggests that disclosure contributes to better psychological adjustment, and enhancement of a positive gay identity (Lesserman, DiSantostefano, Perkins, & Evans, 1994; Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990; Schmitt & Kurdek, 1987; Cass, 1983-84; Minton & McDonald, 1983-84). However, Fassinger & Miller (1996) caution that such variables as race/ethnicity, class, age, geographic location, religion, occupation, and community support need to be considered, and each will have an impact on identity development.

Research indicates that most parents initially react negatively to their son's disclosure of being gay (Harry, 1989; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Remafedi, 1987). Over time, however, the gay son's relationship with both parents tends to improve, and sometimes becomes better than it was before the disclosure (Cramer & Roach, 1988).

Regarding the last theme in this category, *managing the consequences of external homophobia*, I refer the reader to the section in the literature review which concerns Humphrey's (1972, cited in Troiden, 1993) discussion of stigma-management strategies. Humphrey's research indicated that as one develops a positive gay identity, gay men adopt stigma-management strategies that are more open and honest as compared to the earlier strategies they employed. Forty percent of my sample acknowledged that they had suffered some form of discrimination, harassment, or violence because of being gay. In fact, three of them have been physically assaulted in the past. Every gay man needs to learn how to deal with the stigma and the ever-present dangers that exist in our society.

Beyond these three major categories of connecting with self, the gay world, and the straight world, I have suggested that when the three of these combine, the individual forms an integrated positive gay identity. There is research support for this notion. Plummer (1981) argued that gay individuals need to come out to themselves, the gay world, and the straight world. Minton and McDonald (1983-84) suggested that gay men need to integrate their personal identities and their public identities. Furthermore, the resulting self-image requires a supportive interpersonal environment. More recently, Cox and Gallois (1996) argued that gay identity theories have been criticized for not including the social forces which affect individuals. Fassinger and Miller (1996, p. 56) examined "attitudes toward self, other lesbians and gays, and nongays" in their model, which they argued is similar to the approach taken in building models of racial identity.

Gay men live in two worlds (Hencken & O'Dowd, 1977), and aside from learning to cope in these two environments of gay and straight, gay men need to become healed of the internal damage to their sense of self (Cornett, 1995). The person who integrates all three is healthier, and consequently has achieved a more positive gay identity, than one who has not.

After comparing my findings with prior research, I conclude that there is extensive external validation for the themes and categories that emerged from my data. Furthermore, the organization and clustering of these themes and categories, and their final synthesis, are also strongly supported by the published literature. I will now move on to looking at the implications of my study.

Implications of My Study

In this section, I will consider the theoretical implications of my study, including implications for the gay identity theories outlined in chapter two and implications for four of the major general identity theories described in the literature. Lastly, I will review implications for counselling practice.

Theoretical Implications

Gay Identity Theorists

In responding to the theoretical implications, I will refer to the section in the literature review entitled *Gay Identity Theorist's Contribution to Positive Gay Identity*. In Dank's (1971) theory, the highest step of gay development was called *self-acceptance*. In my research, self-acceptance was a vital component of establishing a positive gay identity, but it was one amongst many important milestones. Plummer's (1975) highest stage was called *stabilization*, which was actually described as a type of "role imprisonment." Far from imprisonment, every person in my sample described their experience as providing them freedom and liberation from defined roles. The terms *gay* and *unique* are highly synchronous. In Lee's (1977) model, his fourth stage of *going public* was one that most gay people did not chose. Similarly in Hencken and O'Dowd's (1977) theory, *public identification* was their final stage. In my sample, most had disclosed only to select individuals and groups of individuals. Only one was out in the public sense that Lee (1977) or Hencken and O'Dowd (1977) described.

Cass' (1979) theory is one of the most comprehensive, and her stage's four, five, and six are more applicable to my research: *identity acceptance, identity pride,* and *identity synthesis*, respectively. Identity acceptance and pride, however, are only two of the themes that emerged in my research, and gay pride was only endorsed by two-thirds of my sample on the Themes Questionnaire. Cass (1979) proposed that gay men and lesbians go through a phase where their pride in being gay leads to anger at heterosexual people and a "we-they" mentality. This was not experienced as a common theme by my sample.

Cass' (1979) stage of identity synthesis, on the other hand, suggested that one's gay identity becomes only one part of personal identity and consequently diminishes in importance. This was supported by my research, although gay identity remained as an important determinant of one's identity and group affiliation.

In Coleman's (1981-82) theory, her final stage of identity development was called *identity integration*, and this stage was similar to Cass' (1979) stage of identity synthesis. The *universalistic stage* in Minton and McDonald's (1983-84) model included the three developments of identity acceptance, identity commitment, and identity integration. Compared to my research, I included identity commitment as part of the coming out process, instead of including it in the next process of establishing a positive gay identity. It seemed to me that becoming certain that one is gay is a prerequisite for developing the motivation to go on and become a positive gay man. Further research will be necessary to establish the validity of this assumption, however.

The final developmental achievement in Troiden's (1993) revised theory is called *commitment*. As indicated in the literature review, this stage is characterized by a number of internal indicators (e.g., positive perception of the label *gay*, increased happiness) and external indicators (e.g., same-sex intimate relationships, disclosure to nongays). Implied in his theory is the integration of self, the gay world, and the straight world. Troiden (1993) described movement through his four stages as nonlinear and spiral-like in that development proceeded back and forth between stages. Troiden's theory provides a reasonably good fit for my data, but it still lacks the flexibility that my data suggests regarding what it means to have developed a positive gay identity. For example, Troiden postulated that entering a same-sex relationship marked the onset of the identity commitment stage. My data suggest that this is not always the case. Positive gay men may or may not enter relationships. Their self-acceptance and autonomous thinking leaves relationships as possibilities, but not as necessities.

McCarn and Fassinger's (1996, cited in Fassinger & Miller, 1996) theory considered the simultaneous development of personal identity and social identity. In their stage three, called *deepening-commitment*, gay persons crystallized their identities and became involved in the gay world. In stage four, called *internalization-synthesis*, individuals integrated their individual identities (similar to *connecting with self* in my research) and came to view themselves as part of a minority group. This allegiance to a minority-group mentality was not a pronounced theme of my sample's integration of a positive gay identity. Integration, according to my findings, is far more complex and encompassing than this. The consolidation of identity, for example, may more appropriately be seen as transcending the minority group attitude.

According to the Cox and Gallois (1996) non-stage model of gay identity development, individuals develop both a personal and social identity through the processes of *self-categorization* and *social comparison*. This process model fails to explain why individuals are motivated to self-identify as gay to begin with, and my research clearly suggests that gay men experience many indicators of their developing homoerotic interests. Their theory is also weak in describing the internal psychological processes (*connecting with self* in my research) that occur, and a comprehensive model of gay identity needs to incorporate these experiences.

General Identity Theorists

Cass (1983-84) wrote that the isolation of gay identity theory from the main body of general identity theory and data is significant and unfortunate.

> When homosexual identity is considered from this perspective of *human identity*, interesting questions emerge: can homosexual identity be presented as a construct similar to that described in the general literature as a person's overall identity? Is homosexual identity essentially similar to or different than ethnic, occupational, or status identities? Can we assume homosexual identity and heterosexual identity are structurally alike? (Cass, 1983-84, p. 109).

Since her comment from the early 1980s, my perusal and reading of the literature has neither provided answers to these questions nor have attempts been made to integrate gay identity theory and general identity theory.

The type of integration suggested would require its own dissertation. I believe such an effort would be worthwhile. Today's world, unlike the middle ages (Baumeister, 1986), offers vast choices in what you chose to believe and in what you can become. This necessitates an extended moratorium period if personal identity is to be adequately resolved. Mitchell (1992) concludes that:

> Virtually all research conducted during the 70s, 80s and 90s indicates that the majority of youth in North America *willingly* accommodate to the general demands and expectations of their family, their school and their society. Equally clear is that, for most youngsters, conformism is chosen rather than forced, desired rather than resisted, and fits their emotional dispositions rather than opposes them (p. 173-174).

Within this quote lies one of the fundamental problems experienced by gay people in achieving a positive identity. Contrary to popular opinion, most youth are not "rebels without a cause," and according to Mitchell, they are not rebels at all. To be gay, however, is to be a nonconformist by today's societal mores. The struggle to attain a gay identity requires that one "stand out from the crowd," and to my knowledge, it is the only minority status met with various degrees of rejection by one's own family. Achieving a positive gay identity is a special challenge.

I believe, as does Cass (1983-84), that the general identity theories can benefit from incorporating the complexity of this challenge. I suspect the converse to be true as well (i.e., that the gay identity theories could benefit from incorporating what general identity theories offer). In the following section, I will describe some possible integrations between my findings and the general identity theories of Roy Baumeister, Erik Erikson and James Marcia, Jane Loevinger, and Robert Kegan.

Integrating Baumeister's Theory

Baumeister (1986) reviews our modern search for identity by tracing its roots since the Middle Ages. His treatise provides a historical basis for the social construction of identity. That is, he makes the argument that identity search is a modern construct, for in earlier years, one's identity was mostly defined at birth. The search for identity exists because our society has changed sufficiently since the Middle Ages to allow individuals to have personal choice over how they construct their identity. Social changes have created the vortex from which a socially-constructed identity can emerge. How does this occur?

Baumeister advanced a structural theory of identity, which is in contrast to the stage theories outlined later in this section. Identity, in Baumeister's theory, includes the following parts:

1. two defining criteria.
2. three functional aspects.
3. consists of both major and minor components.
4. developed via five different self-definitional processes.

The two defining criteria are *continuity* and *differentiation*. Continuity refers to the stability of personality over time. Without continuity, the construct of identity would have no meaning (i.e., you would be a different person each moment). Differentiation refers to your uniqueness from other individuals. If we all had the same traits, the lack of distinctiveness would render the construct of identity superfluous.

An individual's *values and priorities* comprise the first functional aspect of identity. This defines how we ought to behave and what we idealize as worthwhile goals. The second functional aspect refers to *interpersonal aspects*. These consist of one's social roles and one's personal reputation. The third function is the sense of *individual potentiality*. This consists of having **realistic** personal goals and having adequate self-esteem to accomplish them.

An indeterminate number of components comprise identity as a whole. Each component, whether major or minor, fulfill both criteria for identity (i.e., continuity and differentiation). For example, if you are gay, it means you will likely define yourself as gay in the future, and this status sets you apart from those who are not gay.

Lastly, Baumeister suggests five ways that identity can be defined by an individual. Type I definition is assigned, meaning that it is provided to you without intervention on your part (eg., your gender, height, social status at birth). Type II definition requires a single transformation (i.e., you have to do one thing to create the identity component), such as getting married or having a child. Type III involves identity being measured on a hierarchy of criteria (eg., becoming rich, where one is always richer or poorer than the next person). Type IV requires an optional choice (eg., you were raised Catholic, and now decide to become Protestant). Type V is the most problematic self-definition as it necessitates a required choice. The individual here does not have a passive option. Choosing a mate is an example. If you want to be married, you need to decide among many possible choices.

I think that Baumeister's theory has a lot to offer in explaining gay identity. Relating it back to my findings, the gay male has not learned to value and prioritize his homoerotic inclinations before coming out. In fact, he attempts to minimize this awareness, knowing that his culture does not approve of these feelings. As the catalysts and hindrances war with each other, the gay male struggles with continuity and differentiation. The gay feelings are not going away, yet this type of differentiation will bring with it societal repugnance. His values and priorities are in angst with competing beliefs.

During his coming out to self, the interpersonal aspect means that the person has now defined himself as gay, which becomes one of many social roles he will play in his lifetime. His gay identity may become a minor component of his personal identity if stigma management is maintained through capitulation, minstrelization, or passing. Increasingly, the gay component takes on increasing importance within the strategies of group alignment, blending, covering, and converting. Within each strategy lie variants of the individual's values and priorities, moving from "I don't want anyone to know, and maybe this is wrong" to "I want people to know, and my gayness is a beautiful part of me."

Although it is generally agreed that people do not have a choice concerning their sexual orientation (Haldeman, 1994; Rothblum, 1994; Roscoe, 1988), they do have a choice in whether to adopt a gay identity. In Baumeister's theory, sexual orientation could be viewed as a type I self-definition (although those in the closet would deny it vehemently), but gay identity requires a type V self-definition. Type V definitions are difficult for everyone, but few decisions carry the same potential for familial and societal rejection as this one. Some parents would rather be told their son is dying of cancer than be told he is gay (Hetrick & Martin, 1984).

Ideally, the gay person comes to see himself as gay (continuity), which defines him as different from most others (differentiation). He learns to value this component of identity, and gives it priority in his life. Lastly, the gay person has come to appreciate that his lifestyle (not his sexual orientation) and alliance to the gay community is his own free choice (a type V self-definition).

Integrating Erikson's and Marcia's Theory

Erikson[25] believed identity resulted from the interaction of one's biological inheritance, the personal meaning that one ascribed to experience, and the culture in which one resided. Erikson is most noted for his delineation of stages of psychosocial development, which provided a contrast to Freud's stages of development which emphasized sexual challenges. The psychosocial stages postulated that humans experience a number of social challenges, and successful resolution allowed positive movement to the next hierarchical stage. Erikson did not view identity as beginning with adolescence, but saw its development beginning in the earlier stages with continued growth throughout the lifespan. Epigenesis is the term Erikson used to describe how development proceeds in a stepwise fashion -- "one item develops on top of another in space and time" (Evans, cited in Kroger, 1996, p. 18).

The stage in which identity takes on critical importance is during adolescence, and this stage suggested the critical development event, or crisis, as residing between a successful identity achievement versus role confusion. Successful resolution would impede the next stage, which finds the achievement of intimacy as the crucial developmental task.

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[25] NOTE: The theories of Erikson, Marcia, Loevinger, and Kegan have all been summarized from Kroger (1996), *Identity in Adolescence: The Balance Between Self and Other*.

The achievement of identity, in Erikson's conception, involves making commitments to oneself. Adopting a worldview, developing worthwhile values, and deciding upon a vocation become important aspects of this commitment.

James Marcia's research has greatly expanded the work of Erikson in understanding the adolescent's search for identity. His major contribution has been in looking at various identity outcomes. If one makes a commitment to identity, two outcomes are possible (i.e., identity achievement or foreclosure). If one does not make a commitment, two outcomes emerge (i.e., identity moratorium or diffusion).

Identity achievement results when individuals challenge their views, and eventually synthesize an identity unique to themselves. Identity foreclosure occurs when people over identify with significant others. They have not adequately challenged their views, but instead have absorbed the views of others uncritically. Moratoriums are in search of identity, but have not yet found their place. They are on a pilgrimage for identity resolution. Diffused individuals are unable to make identity commitments because of either inadequate exposure to appropriate role models, or because of developmental deficits.

As applied to gay identity, Erikson's view of identity as resulting from the triad of biology, self, and culture is directly applicable. Recent research strongly suggests a biological component to sexual orientation (see Hu et al., 1995; LeVay & Hamer, 1994; Friedman & Downey, 1993; Meyer-Bahlburg, 1993: Levay, 1991: Bailey & Pillard, 1991; Swaab & Hofman, 1990; Ellis & Ames, 1987). Culture, as Baumeister has demonstrated, has a strong bearing on our search for identity. Before the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969, which is often thought of as the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1993), the construct of "gay identity" did not exist in any systematized fashion. Before 1969, it would have been difficult to have identified with other gay individuals in a positive sense when the entire subculture was underground. In fact, sexual activity between same-sexed partners was illegal in Canada until 1969 (Lee, 1977). Lastly, one's own interpretation of their inner workings and the culture at large has much to do with if and when a person comes out, and identifies himself as a gay male.

Regarding the four identity outcomes studied by Marcia and associates, one could envision the extended moratorium, diffusion, or foreclosure statuses that would be experienced by homosexual individuals who have been unable to come out. The extended moratorium might be expressed through a lengthy questioning period (i.e., the *inside journey*), possibly because the catalysts are experienced with insufficient intensity (e.g., sexual attraction for either gender is either weak or similarly strong).

A homosexual male who forecloses may do so by adopting a heterosexual identity for an indeterminant period of time. In this instance, the hindrances have kept his homosexual desires from self-expression. After coming out, his identity development may still become foreclosed if he fails to establish his independence from the norms established by either the gay community or the straight world.

The diffused homosexual person could experience a protracted identity crisis, resulting from failure to successfully resolve the conflict between the catalysts and the hindrances. If such individuals go on to define themselves as gay, I would postulate that they would continue to experience a great deal of turmoil and despair.

Each of the above statuses would suggest that the homosexual person is still experiencing some degree of denial. Identity achievement would result from working through the conflict between catalysts and hindrances. A positive gay identity would result from continuing the integration process, as described by my research.

Integrating Loevinger's Theory

Jane Loevinger's theory was developed after analyzing extensive empirical data, which Kroger (1996) claims is an exception to most identity theorists, and revisions have occurred in response to her findings. This inductive approach to developing theory is in contrast to the deductive methods of other general identity theorists. In other words, whereas most theorists propose their theory, and then embark on either supporting it or disproving it, Loevinger's theory developed **after** she reviewed empirical data. Consequently, her theory could be classified as a "grounded theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Loevinger refers to identity as a holistic construct, which she calls ego. Ego development is the process of defining the nature of one's ego, but it is the part that is observable and classifiable (in contrast to "self," which refers to the inner subjective experience). The task of the ego is "the search for coherent meanings in experience" (Loevinger & Wessler, cited in Kroger, 1996, p. 116).

Loevinger's studies have supported the notion that ego develops through a set of hierarchical stages in a predictable order. These stages are here briefly described.

Beginning with the *presocial stage*, a newborn infant is unable to differentiate itself from others, and has no ego. The *symbiotic stage* finds the infant or young child unable to differentiate between itself and its primary caregiver, while possessing some ability to differentiate from its environment. Language acquisition begins in this stage.

The *impulsive stage* characterizes the preschool child. These children are unable to control their impulses, particularly their sexual[26] and aggressive feelings. Adolescents who remain at this stage would likely be diagnosed as having conduct disorder.

When individuals begin to develop impulse control, they are considered to be in the *self-protective stage*. They are now able to anticipate immediate rewards and punishment, and strive to control their impulses to maximize rewards. They continue to blame others, however, for self-initiated acts which precede punishment.

The next stage is the *conformist stage*. It is considered an important transition as the individual is now able to identify with a group, such as family and later peer group. Conformity occurs due to a desire to remain a part of the group, in contrast to motivation resulting from fear of punishment. The beginning of this stage often emerges in early adolescence, and may be retained into adulthood.

Next, the *self-aware level*, considered a transition step between its two adjacent stages, unfolds. It is one of the easiest to study as it exemplifies most American adults (Kroger, 1996). Persons at this level are aware of individual differences. They are no longer subject to the stereotype of thought or behavior expected by a social group. To some extent, they have transcended conformity.

Beyond this transition is the *conscientious stage*. Rules are now internalized, and discerning right from wrong requires a personal evaluation of the situation. This stage brings with it a sense of responsibility to others. Conscientious arrivers see themselves as the authors of their own lives.

Another transition step now occurs, called the *individualistic level*. This step is characterized by increased individuality and greater emphasis on emotional independence (unlike the previous stage which focused on excessive responsibility for others).

The highest level found in most samples studied (Loevinger & Blasi, 1991, cited in Kroger, 1996) is the *autonomous stage*. The distinguishing feature is the individuals' ability to handle conflicting needs and responsibilities. Although their conflicts may be no greater than those at lesser levels, they acknowledge their conflicts and avoid denying them or projecting them onto their environment.

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[26] Kroger (1996) has not described the nature of these sexual feelings.

The final stage achievable is the *integrated stage*, which is characterized by the ability to transcend conflicts of the autonomous stage. There is a greater consolidation of identity, and the end product is considered analogous to Maslow's self-actualized person. A person at this stage views identity as their "primary conscious preoccupation" (Kroger, p. 126).

Development through the stages reflects "a sequence of shifts towards greater internalization of responsibility and increasingly complex differentiation of experiences" (Kroger, p. 126). According to Kroger, Loevinger has been careful not to make an association between level of ego development with positive mental health. An individual at any stage or level can have good-to-poor psychological adjustment.

Before coming out, a gay male would be at least in the impulsive stage in Loevinger's model. One needs to be able to differentiate to distinguish one's feelings as "different" from others. I would postulate that homosexual persons who do not progress beyond both the impulsive stage and the self-protective stage would be defined by high levels of narcissism. They may possibly display predatory inclinations as well.

Homosexual individuals in the conformist stage may or may not develop a gay identity. Before coming out, conformity would be to the expectations of the straight world. After coming out, gay individuals at this stage may overconform to a stereotyped identity of what they believe a gay man is supposed to be. I hypothesize that these people would not be able to develop a positive gay identity until they became capable of growing to a higher stage in Loevinger's theory.

Individuals in either the self-aware, conscientious, individualistic, autonomous, or integrated stages would be capable of developing positive gay identities. People at each of these stages are able to break free from norms and express autonomous thinking and behavior.

For individuals at the integrated stage, where identity is everything, it seems likely that their stigma management strategy would be largely through converting. They would be most likely to examine and re-examine the meaning that gay identity has for them, and consequently they would be the ones most likely to self actualize as gay men.

Integrating Kegan's Theory

Kegan's identity theory looks at how individuals ascribe meaning to their experience. The important question to Kegan is not **what** happens, but **how** the individual makes sense out of what happens. Unlike most theorists, Kegan asks the question of what structure encompasses both affect and cognition, rather than pondering the relationship between the two. His theory offers a constructive-developmental approach to identity formation. That is, an identity is constructed on the basis of certain premises, and this structure then gives way to an increasingly self-oriented construction.

While reality is being construed from within a certain structure, it is not possible to be aware that you are operating from within that structure. In this way, Kegan writes that you **are** the structure from within that which you are operating. The structure that you are is called "subject."

Once a structure is transcended, you are now said to **have** the structure. You no longer **are** the structure (i.e., you have distance from it, and can see it for what it represents). The structure that you have is called "object."

For example, a homosexual man who has not come out to himself experiences a major blind spot regarding his sexuality. In effect, he **is** subject to his false self-perceptions. His perception of his poor success in attracting women may be incorrectly attributed to being physically unattractive or socially undesirable. A realistic perception is not possible until he becomes the object of his perceptions (which requires that he acknowledge his same-sexed inclinations). Now that he **has** his perceptions, he becomes able to realistically interpret, understand, and accept his difficulties in attracting women.

When an event occurs to challenge the existing subject-object balance, the disequilibrium created may lead to transcending the present structure, which leads to yet another structure from which to operate. In effect, our boundaries for how we construct identity change as we develop through Kegan's stages. This will become clearer as these stages are described.

"Transition [between stages] involves loss, a mourning of that loss, and experiencing a sense of vacuum prior to rebalance" (Kroger, p. 149). Growth is costly in that one leaves behind an old way of being in the world. Often relationships with people are affected as development proceeds. One's interpersonal needs change, and this means some relationships diminish to allow new ones to flourish.

What are these stages? The first stage is called *the growth and loss of the incorporative self.* The infant **is** its reflexes and sensations, and there is yet no subject-object balance. The next stage is *the growth and loss of the impulsive balance*, which is where children discover that there is existence beyond themselves. In this stage, children now **have** their reflexes and sensations, and now **are** their perceptions and impulses.

The next stage is *the growth and loss of the imperial balance*. Concrete operational children become capable of having their impulses and perceptions, and they become subject to their own needs, interests, and wishes. The imperial balance permits individuals to control their impulses, but they still cannot coordinate the needs of others. Kegan hypothesizes that this may be the balance of psychopaths (Kroger, p. 157).

Further development leads to *the growth and loss of the interpersonal balance*. Now one can clearly understand the needs of others, but the self **is** one's interpersonal relationships. This means that the individual is very vulnerable to the perspectives of significant others. Perhaps somewhat overstated, it seems that these people are potential victims in their relationships. For example, adults who are unable to leave their abusers may be functioning at this stage.

Next, further growth establishes *the growth and loss of the institutional balance*. The subject now becomes one's career, citizenship, and religion. Interpersonal relationships become part of the object balance, and a new construction of identity develops. The institutions you belong to create personal meaning.

The final stage in Kegan's theory is *the growth of the interindividual balance*. The self is now differentiated from its institutions, and transcends to where the subject **is** interindividuality. "Now . . . a self is 'brought to, rather than derived from, others'" (Kroger, p. 160). The self, in other words, is now able to create itself.

One strength of Kegan's theorizing, as it relates to gay identity, is his recognition that growth often brings with it a cost. Growth itself is often painful, and mourning of one level may precede the attainment of another. Achieving a gay identity is a painful process for most individuals (it is offset by the exhilaration that usually accompanies it, however).

What insights gleaned from Kegan's model may help to explain my findings? We would expect that homoerotic feelings would begin to surface while in the imperial balance where one has their impulses and perceptions. If one was still the subject of their impulses and perceptions (i.e., in the previous stage of impulsive balance), one probably cannot objectify their feelings and see them as culturally unacceptable.

Is it possible that this is just what happens during the impulsive balance? The son's overtures, likely toward the father, would not be well received by a homophobic father, who in turn would show his disapproval of his son's homoerotic behavior[27]. Such disapproval could not be understood by a child in the impulsive balance for what it was--disapproval of the sexual impulse. Consequently, the child in this stage could internalize the disapproval at some other level. The result: feeling different, but not knowing why, and feeling less for being different.

As for the conflict experienced in developing a gay identity, we could hypothesize that confusion would be greatest within the lower stages in Kegan's model. So long as you **are** your needs or wishes (i.e., the *imperial balance*), for example, your ability to empathize and relate to others would be severely compromised. Such individuals would have great difficulty establishing a positive gay identity. The gay individual in the impulsive balance or the imperial balance may be similar to Loevinger's impulsive stage: perhaps predatory and probably narcissistic.

So long as you **are** your interpersonal relationships (i.e., the *interpersonal balance*), intimate relationships would be marked by strong dependency needs. One would likely have trouble defining a clear sense of self as well. "Self" would be defined primarily by other people, presumably other gay males for those who have come out. A gay male in the interpersonal balance would likely have trouble coming out to straight individuals (fearful of rejection), especially parents, but would find comfort in having a gay peer group.

So long as you **are** your institutions (i.e., the *institutional balance*), your identity may become totally defined by the groups to whom you belong. Gay individuals at this stage may over-identify with the gay community, for example, or with their careers.

In each of the above stages in Kegan's model, freedom to choose is compromised. Only in the interindividual balance does the individual gain the ability to transcend institutions and become a self that is not derived from others. Meaning for gays at the interindividual balance would come through their own interpretation of what it means to be gay. I hypothesis that it is here where we would find most men who have developed a positive gay identity.

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[27] This idea was described in Isay's (1996) book.

Conclusions Regarding the Integration of Theories

Each of the general identity theorists reviewed have contributed to understanding the results of my study. As I mentioned earlier, an integration between gay identity research and general identity theory is lacking in the published literature. The synthesis I offered here is not exhaustive, but rather exemplary of the type of work necessary to build bridges with the huge body of knowledge that is already established regarding how we come to understand and define ourselves.

Counselling Practice Implications

After reviewing the literature, Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, Hurley, and Ruprecht (1992) concluded that most counsellors, counsellor trainees, and female counselling psychology students have received little or no training or even exposure to the issues facing gay men and lesbians. In my own experience, I am completing a Ph.D. in counselling psychology, and after nine years of full-time university attended in Alberta between the years 1974 and 1996, I have not had one hour of class time ever devoted to looking at the psychology of gay men and lesbians. In retrospect, I find that shocking and distressing.

Gay individuals represent a sizable proportion of the population, and yet the silence and minimization we have felt has been suffered on many fronts, even within the institutions within which we most expect to find acceptance. April Martin (1982. p. 342) argued that "the omissions of society's teachings [about homosexuality] reflect a demeaning view of homosexuality."

Gay students are not well liked on campus. One researcher found that 75% of lesbians and gay men in a university community had been subject to verbal insults and 25% to threats of physical violence (D'Augelli, 1989, cited in Simoni, 1996). Gay men and lesbians perceive academic environments as relatively homophobic and unsupportive of them (Reynolds, 1989). Dworkin and Gutierrez (1989) concluded that students, including counselling trainees, exhibit heterosexist beliefs and negative attitudes toward gay people. "It is presumptuous to assume that counselors who have been taught about valuable concepts like unconditional positive regard are able to apply them with gay-lesbian clients if they are not aware of their own heterosexist or homophobic biases" (Iasenza, 1989, p. 74).

Morin and Garfinkle (1978) had earlier found that *dramatic* changes in attitudes resulted for both graduate and undergraduate students from attending a single course on homosexuality. A major attitudinal shift occurred from merely taking them to several gay bars. Many writers have argued for the inclusion of information about gay men and lesbians in the training of counsellors for all of the reasons noted (Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, & Hurley, 1992; Buhrke, 1989; Iasenza, 1989; Graham, Rawlings, Halpern, & Hermes, 1984; Morin & Garfinkle, 1978). Such curriculum should include information about the following:

> (1) Lesbian/gay life-styles and support networks . . . (2) Homophobia and heterosexism . . . (3) Self-esteem in lesbian and gay male clients. Therapists should have techniques to help lesbians and gay men develop high self-esteem, . . . (4) Appropriate and inappropriate therapeutic goals . . . (Graham, Rawlings, Halpern, & Hermes, 1984, p. 493).

Beyond training, there are special skills and attitudes required of counsellors who want to practice with gay clients. Shannon and Woods (1991) suggest that (1) therapists need to have a nonhomophobic attitude; (2) they require training and experience in treating addictive disorders, such as alcohol and drug abuse, sexual compulsiveness, and eating disorders[28]; (3) couples counsellors need to know about issues unique to male couples; (4) skills in group counselling can be a helpful adjunct to therapy with gay clients; and (5) therapists have a very important ethical responsibility to teach gay-men about safer sex. The authors also highlight the importance of addressing the existential/spiritual dimension.

Fassinger (1991) describes a number of additional guidelines for those who wish to offer gay affirmative counselling. These include (1) feeling comfortable and appreciating your own sexuality; (2) encouraging clients to develop a gay support system; (3) helping your clients to desensitize their shame and guilt regarding same-same thoughts, feelings, and behaviors by showing your approval and affirmation; (4) increase your knowledge and skills for working with lesbian women and gay men; (5) learn about other kinds of diversity and how these interact with being gay; (6) acquire knowledge and training in AIDS related issues; and (7) become especially sensitive to ethical issues (e.g., confidentiality). Russell (1989) adds that therapists need to be comfortable in talking candidly about sex and intimacy, and they must be "truly unbiased." (p. 336).

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[28] The authors clarify that these disorders are not unique to gay people, but they are common clinical concerns.

Referring specifically to the findings from my research, I would urge clinicians to appreciate the diversity and complexity of the task that men undertake in establishing a positive gay identity. A gay man's development will follow a unique path. Consequently, no two gay men with positive identities will look exactly alike. However, their struggles will have some communalities. If results from my research can be extrapolated, which I have argued earlier is defensible based on available published qualitative and quantitative research, each gay man attempting to integrate his identity will need to consolidate his inner healing with the social environments that comprise the gay world and the straight world. My research has identified a number of themes within each of these three spheres of development. Gay men may need your help to find solutions to problems within either or all of the three domains.

Suggestions for Further Research

The entire field of gay and lesbian studies has been undermined by the invisibility of large numbers of gay individuals. As I wrote in chapter two, the available research is fraught with conceptual difficulties and sampling problems. Further research is needed in every area of gay and lesbian studies with particular attention paid to these concerns. Regarding my research, studies could be developed that look at the necessary and sufficient ingredients of positive gay identity. For example, is it important that positive gay men give something back to the gay community? If so, what are the psychological benefits to the giver and the receiver?

My study cannot ascertain the relative importance of the themes that emerged during the analysis. Well-designed quantitative studies may help to answer this question. For example, perhaps developing self-acceptance is more important than embracing wholeness or attaining authenticity. My research cannot answer such a question.

My research is culture bound and specific to the current political climate in Alberta. What is the construction and integration of gay identity like in cultures which are more accepting of homosexuality? How would the results compare to my study?

Referring to the purely theoretical level, what are the ways in which gay identity theory can be integrated into general identity theory, and vice versa? How can one contribute to the other?

Research in counselling practice could focus on designing and studying techniques to help gay clients achieve positive gay identities. If my research can be seen as an experiential template, how do we help gay men achieve these experiences? How do we help them learn from them? What can be taught, and what needs to be experienced first hand?

These are just a few examples. I encourage more students, academics, and clinicians alike to take a greater interest in conducting research in gay and lesbian studies. Without question, much work still needs to be done.

Conclusions

> *"If I am nothing but what I believe I am supposed to be -- who am 'I'?"*
> *(Fromm, 1969/1941, p. 280).*

In this chapter, I have summarized my research study, reviewed its potential limitations, compared my study and validated its results with the published literature, provided the implications of my findings for identity theory and counselling practice, and offered a few suggestions for further research. I am ready to offer my conclusions.

Quoting Shannon and Woods (1991, p. 198), "the importance of establishing a positive gay identity cannot be overstated." The cost of not developing a positive identity is staggering to gay people, and society at large. Many personal difficulties have been associated with remaining in denial of one's sexual orientation, and in failing to develop a positive gay identity after coming out. Those afflicted have paid an incredible price to try and be something they are not. It takes incredible courage to recognize one's difference, to act upon it, and then to celebrate it. My dissertation has been about the courage and determination of men who have become free enough of societal oppression that they can see, hear, feel, touch, and taste another ideology. The gay affirmative view is that we are equal: being gay is no better and no worse than being straight. It sounds like an easy place to get to, yet nothing could be further from the truth. Society continues to discriminate and harass gay individuals, overtly through not recognizing our equal rights and covertly through maintaining the silence at every institutional level. Even caged animals will eventually retaliate. We have been caged long enough.

Positive gay identity is about liberation, inspiration, courage, strength, nonconformity, acceptance of self, acceptance of others, uniqueness, and love. That which grows from within flowers and becomes visible to everyone who takes notice. The *"love that dare not speak its*

name*"** (Oscar Wilde, quoted in de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978, p. 66) ***now has a name. The positive gay man loves others in so much as he loves himself. It's about time we help him to do so.

Reflections

I learned a long time ago that I could only enter a room when I was ready to accept what was inside it. Before then, the door is locked. Even a frantic attempt to open it meets only with frustration and despair.

I opened the door to my own coming out five years ago. Since then, I have had the privilege of talking to others about how they faced what was inside their closet. I feel deeply blessed that I was allowed to hear their stories, feel their pain, and experience their joy. Each co-researcher reminded me of the communality of our lived experiences.

Working on this dissertation has been more fulfilling and upsetting at times than I would have expected. Some gay men talk about disclosing to others as their second coming out. Doing this work has felt like a third. I again rode the roller coaster as I learned about theory, engaged in counselling practice, interviewed co-researchers, wrote the dissertation, and simultaneously lived my own experiences. The intensity I did not expect. I can say now that I have grown far more in the last two years than I had in the previous three.

Heuristic research has offered me a growth opportunity which I will never forget. One of my co-researchers correctly intuited one of my own motivations for researching this topic. I too needed to learn more about developing a positive gay identity. No one has it all together. I can only hope now that what I have learned will be of benefit to all of us. This work, after all, has been part of my salvation, and part of my giving back to the gay community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Mail Out Enclosures

I. Informed Consent Form

Subject Title:	*"The Experience of Building a Positive Gay Identity"*
Investigator:	*Kevin Alderson*

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research. I value the unique contribution that you can make to my study and am excited about the possibility of your participation in it. The purpose of this document is to inform you about some aspects of this research, and to request your signature at the end of it to acknowledge your written consent.

I am a psychologist and doctoral candidate at the University of Alberta, under the supervision of Dr. John Mitchell and Dr. Ronna Jevne, both professors in the Department of Educational Psychology. I selected my research question because of my personal experience with this topic. The question I have chosen is *"What is the experience of men who construct and integrate a positive gay identity?"*

The research model I am using is a qualitative one through which I hope to understand the essence of your experience. You will be asked to recall specific episodes or events in your life in which you experienced the phenomenon we are investigating. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you: your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience.

Initially, I will ask you to complete three short questionnaires (enclosed), followed by an interview. I anticipate that the interview may take anywhere from 2-to-3 hours. Interviews will be tape recorded. Later, I will ask you to read my written description of your experience to ensure its accuracy. Near the end of the project, I will ask you to read a synthesis of everyone's experience, and request your feedback as to its thoroughness. In appreciation of your help, I will give you a bound copy of my findings once it is available.

You are free not to answer any question during the interview and you may choose to withdraw from the project at any time without providing any reason for doing so. Your anonymity is guaranteed as your name will not appear in any transcript or report of the results. Another name selected by you will be used in all transcripts. All information is kept strictly confidential and interview transcripts will only be seen by researchers involved in this study. Transcripts and taped interviews will be stored in my own locked cabinet. The tapes will be either erased or returned to you at the end of the study while the transcripts will be kept indefinitely for possible future analysis.

Participation in this study may be of no personal benefit to you. However, based on the experiences of other people involved in similar types of research projects, you may benefit from the support and validation of your experiences. Alternatively, talking about your experience may bring up some painful emotions and/or memories for you, and if you feel it necessary or desirable, I will ensure that arrangements are made for you to speak to a qualified counsellor.

If further information about this research project is desired, please call me, Kevin Alderson, at 434-3823.

SIGNED CONSENT

I agree to participate in the research project as described above. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and am participating voluntarily. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a PhD degree, including a dissertation and any other future publication. Permission is also granted to use quotes and stories in published articles and in presentations.

SIGNATURE

DATED

WITNESS

II. Identity Questionnaire

Date: ____________________ Co-Researcher #: ______

1. (a) I am:

   1. Straight ____
   2. Bisexual ____
   3. Gay ____

(b) How certain of this are you?

1	2	3	4	5
Quite uncertain	Somewhat uncertain	Certain, with occasional doubt	Certain, with rare doubt	Absolutely Certain (never any doubt)

Please continue responding to this questionnaire if you define yourself as gay, and if you rated your certainty at "3, 4, or 5" above.

If you define yourself as either straight or bisexual, or if you are uncertain with regard to your sexual identity (ie., a rating of "1 or 2" above), there is no need to continue completing this questionnaire. Although I truly appreciate your willingness to take part, the focus of my research is with men who are comfortably gay.

---

2. (a) **Please write your own definition of *positive gay identity*?**

____

____

____

(b) According to your definition, to what extent do you believe you have attained it?

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all					Completely

III. Sexual Orientation Questionnaire

	PRESENT	PAST (that is, before defining yourself as gay)
AFFECTIONAL PREFERENCE (ie., this refers to your preference for male or female emotional partners)	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all heterosexual Somewhat heterosexual Very heterosexual	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all heterosexual Somewhat heterosexual Very heterosexual
	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all homosexual Somewhat homosexual Very homosexual	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all homosexual Somewhat homosexual Very homosexual
PHYSICAL PREFERENCE (ie., this refers to your preference for male or female sexual partners)	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all heterosexual Somewhat heterosexual Very heterosexual	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all heterosexual Somewhat heterosexual Very heterosexual
	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all homosexual Somewhat homosexual Very homosexual	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all homosexual Somewhat homosexual Very homosexual
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR (ie., this refers to your actual sexual behavior with males and/or females)	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all heterosexual Somewhat heterosexual Very heterosexual	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all heterosexual Somewhat heterosexual Very heterosexual
	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all homosexual Somewhat homosexual Very homosexual	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all homosexual Somewhat homosexual Very homosexual
SEXUAL FANTASIES (ie., this refers to your sexual fantasies experienced during either masturbation or during sex with a partner)	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all heterosexual Somewhat heterosexual Very heterosexual	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all heterosexual Somewhat heterosexual Very heterosexual
	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all homosexual Somewhat homosexual Very homosexual	1 2 3 4 5 Not at all homosexual Somewhat homosexual Very homosexual

[adapted from Shively & De Cecco, 1977]

IV. Biographical Questionnaire

Date: ________________________ Co-Researcher #: _____

Some of the information requested here is highly personal. Please remember that this information is strictly confidential, and I will be the only person with access to it.

1. General Information

Age: ______ Occupation: ______________________________

Education (highest grade or credential earned): ___________________________

Living Arrangement (circle one): Living alone Living with a roommate Living with a partner
Living with a partner and children Living with children Other _________________

Marital Status (circle one): Single Engaged Married Separated Divorced Widowed

Do you live in: house, hotel, room, apartment, other _______________________

2. Personal and Social History

(a) Place of birth: ____________________________

(b) Where have you lived throughout your life? Please list places in chronological order.

____

____

____

(c) Who were your primary caregivers in childhood? (eg., mother, father, both, or other -- if other, please specify) ____

(d) Father: Living? _______ If alive, give father's present age _______
Where does your father live? ________________________

Deceased? _____ If deceased, give his age at time of death ________
How old were you at the time? _________
Cause of Death ____

Occupation _____________________________ Health ________________

How would you rate your father's approach (or other male caregiver) to rearing you in childhood (ie., very strict, strict, lenient, or very lenient)?

____

How would you rate the quality of the relationship (ie., excellent, good, fair, or poor) you have had with your father, or other male caregiver, during the following periods of your life:

Rating

(1) When you were a child? _________________

(2) As a teenager? _________________

(3) Now? _________________

(e) Mother: Living? ________ If alive, give mother's present age ________
Where does your mother live? _________________________

Deceased? _____ If deceased, give her age at time of death ________
How old were you at the time? _________

Cause of Death ____

Occupation _____________________________ Health ________________

How would you rate your mother's approach (or other female caregiver) to rearing you in childhood (ie., very strict, strict, lenient, or very lenient)?

____

How would you rate the quality of the relationship (ie., excellent, good, fair, or poor) you have had with your mother, or other female caregiver, during the following periods of your life:

Rating

(1) When you were a child? _________________

(2) As a teenager? _________________

(3) Now? ________________

(f) Siblings

Please list your brothers and sisters below, including their names, ages, gender, occupations (if applicable), and also rate the quality of the relationship you presently have with them (ie., excellent, good, fair, or poor):

#	Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Quality of Relationship (excellent, good, fair, or poor)
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

3. Intimate Relationships

Please list the intimate relationships you have had below that you consider significant in your life. Include relationships with either gender, and begin with the most recent.

#	First Name	First Met?	Length of Relationship	Quality of Relationship (excellent, good, fair, or poor)
1	(use this space only if you are in a relationship presently)			
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

4. Emotional Health

(a) Over the past five years, have you experienced emotional problems? _______

(b) If "YES", please describe: ____

(c) How would you rate your current level of happiness?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
very low				moderate					very high

(d) Have you been feeling anxious lately? _______

If "YES", to what degree?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
very low				moderate					very high

(e) Have you been feeling depressed lately? _______

If "YES", to what degree?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
very low				moderate					very high

5. Spiritual Beliefs

(a) Religion raised in: __________________

(b) Present religion/spirituality: ____________________

(c) Has being gay affected your spiritual beliefs? If so, in what way? ____________________

____

6. Identity

(a) How old were you when you were first aware that you might be gay (ie., some people describe this as feeling "different" from others)? ________

(b) How old were you when you came out to yourself (ie., when you acknowledged to yourself that you were gay)? ________

(c) Who have you chosen to disclose your gayness to (include family, friends, and colleagues)?

____

(d) In childhood, did you behave in any ways that were considered more appropriate for girls than boys? If so, what were these cross-gender behaviors?

____

V. Sample Interview Questions

Below you will find some sample interview questions to help you reflect on your experience of building a positive gay identity prior to our interview. I will be interested in your experience as it relates to your life in the past, the present, and the future.

General Question

1. I want to understand the journey you embarked upon to feel good about yourself as a gay man. In other words, tell me the story of how you came to adopt a positive gay identity.

Past Focus

2. Describe the bad times you experienced before and after coming out (as related to acquiring a positive gay identity). What feelings and body sensations are associated with these memories?

3. Describe the good times you experienced before and after coming out (as related to acquiring a positive gay identity). What feelings and body sensations are associated with these memories?

Present Focus

4. What meaning does being gay have for you?

5. Upon reflection, is there a metaphor, image, or piece of music that speaks to your gay identity?

Future Focus

6. In order to continue developing a positive gay identity, what steps would you need to take? What still needs to develop or happen for you?

7. What gives you hope and keeps you going?

Appendix B:

Telephone Patter

1. Hello, this is Kevin Alderson phoning. I am a PhD student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Alberta, and I am doing research on the experience of men who have developed a positive gay identity. I am wondering if you would be willing to take part in this research. This would involve having you fill out three short questionnaires, which would take less than a hour to complete, followed by a two-to-three hour interview with me. I will be writing about your experience in my research, and at the completion of my study, I will provide you a bound copy of the results (essentially, a copy of my dissertation).

2. The results of this study will add to our knowledge about gay identity, and it will help counsellors who are dealing with gay individuals who are just coming out. I believe a lot can be learned from those who have already achieved a positive identity.

3. The interview that we would have together would be tape recorded, so I want to stress to you that your confidentiality will be assured. I will be the only person with access to the tape, and once I am finished with it, I will give it to you.

4. Would you be able to spare a few hours to take part in my research?

5. If "NO",
Thank you for your time. If you change your mind, please contact me through the Educational Psychology office at the U. of A. Have a nice day.

---

5. If "YES"
That's great. To ensure that you are eligible to take part in this research, I would like to ask you four questions right now:

6. Do you define yourself as gay, or bisexual?

7. How certain of this are you?

1	2	3	4	5
Quite uncertain	Somewhat uncertain	Certain, with occasional doubt	Certain, with rare doubt	Absolutely certain (never any doubt)

8. Do you see yourself as having attained a positive gay identity?

9. To what extent do you believe you have attained it?

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all					Completely

10. Set up interview time.

11. Get address to send out questionnaires. Please complete these prior to our interview.

12. Thank you for taking part in this study, ________________. I look forward to meeting with you in person on ____________________. See you then.

Appendix C:

My List of Interview Questions

I had the following list of questions available at each interview. At the end of the unstructured part of an interview, I referred to these questions and asked those that I thought were still appropriate to ask:

Initial Questions

1. I want to understand the journey you embarked upon to feel good about yourself as a gay man. In other words, tell me the story of how you came to adopt a positive gay identity.

Past Focus

2. Describe the bad times you experienced before and after coming out (as related to acquiring a positive gay identity). What feelings and body sensations are associated with these memories?

3. Were you ever the subject of discrimination, harassment (including derogatory comments), prejudice, abuse (emotional, sexual, or physical), or gay bashing as a consequence of being gay? If so, how did you handle each instance?

4. Describe the good times you experienced before and after coming out (as related to acquiring a positive gay identity). What feelings and body sensations are associated with these memories?

5. How did you come to be gay?

6. What had to happen for you in order to build a positive gay identity?

7. What have you gone through to get to where you are now as a gay man?

8. Provide an example of a time when you were challenged in your identity as a gay man.

9. How have you integrated your gay identity into your other identities (eg., career identity, religious beliefs and/or personal values, family of origin identity, identity disclosed to heterosexual friends) - (for select others, this may include fatherhood, leather drag, female impersonation).

10. What was the reaction of your family and friends when you disclosed your gayness to them (if applicable)?

11. Did you (or do you) have a gay role model? Who taught you how to be gay?

Present Focus

12. What criteria do you use in defining yourself as gay (affect, behavior, or cognition primarily)?

13. Are there any issues (thoughts, feelings, conflicts, fears, problems, aspirations, and so forth) that are new to you where you are at now in your development as a positive gay man?

14. How do you manage the stigma of being gay?

15. What do you believe is the hallmark of being gay?

16. What advice would you give to teenagers or men when they first come out to themselves?

17. What is most important to you presently about being a gay man?

18. What meaning does being gay have for you?

19. Upon reflection, is there a metaphor, image, movie, or piece of music that really speaks to your gay identity?

20. Do you practice any rituals as a way of celebrating your gay identity (eg., celebrating your gay birthday)?

Future Focus

21. In order to continue developing a positive gay identity, what steps would you need to take? What still needs to develop or happen for you? **or** What will you be like when you are functioning optimally as a gay man? What steps will you need to take to get you there?

22. What is either slowing you down or holding you back from taking the next step?

23. What gives you hope and keeps you going?

24. What would you put in a "hope box" for gay people? What needs to happen within the gay community? What changes need to happen to mainstream society?

Last Question

25. Do you think that we have dealt with this topic thoroughly? Is there anything missing?

Appendix D:

Responses to My Question #16

Note: I asked each of the co-researchers the following question near the end of their interview. Here is a compiliation of their edited responses:

"What advice would you give to teenagers or men when they first come out to themselves?"

Co-Researcher #1
Take it at your own speed. Do what feels comfortable and don't be forced to do anything . . . for example, telling people. Telling everyone is not necessarily a good idea. Do it when you feel ready for it, when you're okay with it. That would be my primary advice. The other thing is just be yourself. Really let yourself explore and don't be dictated by what the gay community says you have to be or do. Find out about all the different groups that there are and find your niche. I think a lot of people get lost in the community when they first come out.

Co-Researcher #2
Look for positive gay role models. The media is beginning to do this, and I'm aware that there is even a comic book right now where the superhero has come out as gay, called Alpha Force.

When you come out, you can really get sucked into a vortex at the gay night clubs. It will give you instant infatuation, but it's not a healthy segment of the community. Go to the clubs and enjoy them on a Friday or Saturday night, but then go home back to reality again. Don't rely on the clubs for your social support. It's so easy to get sucked into it. I would warn newcomers that there are many unhealthy gay people -- some of the most homophobic people out there are gay people. That's a realization that a lot of people don't realize.

Learn as much as you can about being gay by reading some really good books on the topic. Gay people are very diverse. You can take a cross section of the gay community and there's black ones and yellow ones and white ones and rich ones and poor ones and good people and assholes. It's exactly the same composition in the straight community. About the only stereotype that does hold true is the increased rate of alcoholism and drug abuse in the gay community. There is also a lot more hurt in the gay community.

Co-Researcher #3
There are gay people and there are straight people. We're all just people. The success in your life is going to depend on the type of person you are, not upon the fact that you're gay. Work hard, have some fun, have some good friends, be true and honest and loving and compassionate. Don't hide the fact that you're gay. You are going to run into people who aren't going to accept you because you are gay, and those are people you don't want to be around anyhow. Live life normally.

What's going to make you happy in life? Some examples include finding someone special, being well read, communicating effectively with people, having some friends, and being a good person. Help other people out -- do a little volunteerism, that type of stuff. It all depends on what's going to make you happy, what you find exciting. I'm not one to sit down and start telling people the pitfalls of *"now watch out for this or watch out for that."* Common sense will usually tell a young man or woman what's good for them and what's not. Everybody is going to try the odd nasty from time to time. They're going to do it regardless of the advice I give them. My advice is study hard, work hard, be kind, find the right person, settle down. Be happy.

Co-Researcher #4

I think practicing safe sex and being aware of AIDS is the most important thing. Also, how sure are you and how strongly do you feel that you are gay? Be absolutely certain. When I became conscious that I was gay, I knew it was not going to change. It became so important to me that I am gay. Be strong with it.

Co-Researcher #5

The most important thing I can tell anybody is be true to yourself. If you are gay, admit it and deal with it and go on. If you're not, admit that, deal with it and go on. Don't sit back and go, *"am I, or aren't I? I got to try this, I got to try that."* Be decisive because if you aren't, you'll second guess yourself every time any little bad thing occurs. If you have decided that you are gay, take the bull by the horns and say, *"I am gay and I'm going to take whatever comes my way, good or bad."* Take the time and find out, and once you have decided, admit it and get on with it.

Co-Researcher #6

Each person will deal with their coming out differently. The sooner you realize this, the better off you are. Also be aware that lots of lesbians and gay men go through lives very successfully, happily, and fulfilled and there is no reason why you shouldn't be able to do the same thing.

Co-Researcher #7

Most importantly, make sure you choose carefully the people you first tell. They will have a major impact on how you view yourself. Choose people you really think will hear you, help you, understand you, and be there for you: that's an essential start in a gay life. To me, acceptance from others is very important. Otherwise, I don't want to have a relationship with that person. Tolerance is not sufficient.

You will need to learn more about sexuality and about how to interact as a gay person with those who are straight. Learn to set yourself goals. For example, developing a certain group of friends, or trying to create balance with your family or with friends. Set a goal to experiment sexually as a gay man. Depending on your goal, try out a relationship or have a few one-night stands. Have a vision of what you want. Tell yourself that you can't have everything under the sun the first month after you come out. You have to begin with elementary learning before you advance to secondary and eventually post-secondary.

Co-Researcher #8

I don't think I could really advise the person to do anything. If they accept the fact that they are gay, I don't think I could tell them how to determine that identity for themselves. I think being gay is easier today than it's ever been in our culture, at least for the past two hundred years. That's not necessarily true in all cultures and communities, however. A previous Asian boyfriend of mine really struggled in dealing with his family. I couldn't advise him. I simply told him that some people are going to have a really hard time accepting the fact that you are gay.

It is important to appreciate the reality of AIDS, and to protect yourself sexually. I would definitely advise people to be a lot more open about their gayness, providing their circumstances allow it. Ultimately, they have to be their own judge as to how open they want to be.

Realize that being gay is not supported in the world around you. The world in which we live is predominantly heterosexual and it supports that lifestyle. You really have to look deeper if you want to find things that are gay positive. You can't be gay alone. Implied in being gay is that you are going to be with other gay people. This doesn't mean you need to get rid of all your straight friends. A challenge in developing a positive gay identity is learning how to survive in a straight world as a gay person without compromising your values.

It is easier not to deal with the larger world by insulating yourself in the gay ghetto. Perhaps that is why many people do it. They are out in their own gay world, but when it comes to anything outside that world they adopt a whole different persona. When they go to work, there's no lover that calls them at noon to see how they're doing or if they want to meet for lunch. If the insulated gay man gets a call from his lover, nobody knows him. By contrast, if a straight guy gets a call from his wife, everyone knows who it is. Those kinds of issues are difficult, so be prepared for them.

Remember, though, that it is up to you to determine what your own experience will be like. You create your own gay identity. Nobody can really do that for you. Do things that are comfortable for yourself. If you don't like something, don't do it.

Co-Researcher #9

Be safe and learn about condom use and STD's. Be happy about what you're doing. Know that you're not the only one. A lot of people think they're the only one, they're weird, they need therapy, they need hospitalization, or there's a cure. There's no cure. Just be who you are and be happy who you are. If someone is bringing you down, move them out of your life. Be with people who support you. I don't necessarily agree with gay youth groups because of all the horror stories I've heard. To me they sound like meat racks where older guys want to meet the young kids for sex. Maybe this happens and maybe it doesn't. If there is no other alternative, seek out a gay-friendly therapist.

Co-Researcher #10

When you first come out to yourself, be sure of who you really are. Try not to get involved in one night stands right away because of a lack within you. If you do, however, be sure to practice safer sex. Understand yourself and love yourself enough so that you can let others know who you are.

Co-Researcher #11

I would assure them that they're not the only one who has gone down this path. There are many people like them who have faced the same problems and overcome them very well. They should know that life can be very positive in the future for them. Whatever religion we were raised in, I think we have all been told that our orientation is wrong or evil or against God's will. Consequently, many of us grew up and developed guilt feelings initially because of that. The truth is that the way we were created is God's will. I think it's very reassuring that some organized religions in the world are slowly recognizing this. Two examples are the United Church and the Anglican Church. My point is, realize that you are a decent person, you were created the way you were, there's lots to look forward to and there are a lot of very decent people who are exactly like you.

You don't have a choice in who you are. The only choice is whether to accept who you are, or to deny this and pretend you are someone else.

Co-Researcher #12
Get all the information you can and become comfortable with who you are. Hopefully you have a supportive family or a counsellor who can help.

Co-Researcher #13
To thine own self be true. Read some of the literature so that you don't feel so isolated or alone. The experience of coming out can be a very lonely experience, especially for a young person. Dealing with one's sexual feelings is difficult for anybody, but when your sexual feelings are outside of the norm, that can be devastating. I think we've seen that in the high rate of suicides amongst gay youth. Take your time, and spend time in reflection and contemplation. You can learn an awful lot by going through periods of self evaluation and isolation. If you become depressed, get the help you need from your local community centre or from other resources. Mental health professionals are a lot more knowledgable and accepting of a person's sexual orientation now than ten-to-twenty years ago. If you need professional help, get it. I suspect that the gay issue may be just one of many issues that a person is going through at any particular time in their life.

Co-Researcher #14
In my last term at Carlton University, I came out to quite a few of my straight friends. I really felt empowered by that and it really felt good. They were shocked, but I felt very positive by that because they didn't know gay people and I seemed as normal as they were. I think that was good for them. I would encourage young people toward youth groups. You want to develop a good self-image because it's important that you realize it is okay to be gay.

Co-Researcher #15
I've thought about this before and I've done it as well. I've given people this advice and I feel pretty strongly about it, although I also understand other perspectives. It's a reflection of my experience.

I'm a firm believer of having control of our lives. Unless your sexuality and dealing with your sexuality stands in the way of doing other things in your life, I would hang onto that struggle until you are in a position of power. That is, until your sexuality can't harm you in the rest of your life. I have great admiration for youth coming out at ages fifteen-to-nineteen. It takes incredible strength. It is a real risk when you disclose to your parents and the rest of the world. Disclosing in high school is a place where you stand a lot to lose.

I made a trade. In order to maintain security in my life, I delayed living as an out gay man until I was a bit older. I wouldn't necessarily recommend that others take the path I did, but I would suggest that you think about your options first. Stop and do the analysis. Weigh the pros and cons before you rush into it. I'm like the conservative banker that says buy blue chip stocks: think about it, be strong in yourself, and come out on your own terms from a place of power. You need to decide if you are ready to accept the costs that may result. Are you able to handle the possible consequences at this time in your life?

Co-Researcher #16

If you are only fifteen or sixteen, remember your age before you jump into being gay. The gay community may give you the impression that you need to jump into it, but you don't. If you can develop a healthy support system amongst other young gay people or young straight people, then you may have the ability to become an openly gay fifteen-year old. Don't lose sight of the fact that you are still only fifteen. I think young gay people too often think, *"let's see how many cocks I can suck, and see how much tequila I can drink."*

Unfortunately being gay and young is not a healthy combination in North America. There's a commonly felt need to get involved in the gay community, but instead they get involved in the bar community. They are not one and the same. I get frustrated when straight people say *"oh, all gay people like to sleep around or they're drunks or they're this or that."* There are three gay bars in Calgary. If you compare the gay bars to the straight bars on a Saturday night, the ratio of gay patrons who sleep around and drink heavily is probably not much different than the straight patrons.

In Calgary, there's not many alternatives to the gay bar. How are young gay people going to develop in a healthy way here? That scares me.

Appendix E:

Responses to My Question #19

Note: I asked each of the co-researchers the following question near the end of their interview. Here is a compiliation of their edited responses:

"Is there a metaphor, image, movie, or piece of music that really speaks to your gay identity?"

Co-Researcher #1

I've really identified with two songs, one of which is Elton John's This Is My House. He brings his lover into his house and explains that this is who he is, that this is his bed and he want to share it. I really thing that's a very special piece of music. The other song is Jann Arden's Good Mother, which I think is her way of saying to her parents or to others "I'm okay, I'm gay," even though she's not publicly out. To me, she's saying that she's got a good life, a good mother, and a good father. She's got a house, and she's just like everyone else, so you don't have to worry about her.

Co-Researcher #2

The movie entitled Harold and Maude. It had nothing to do with gayness, but to me it had everything to do with gayness. Harold was this boy in this rich family with a domineering mother and a deceased father. Harold was doing the right thing, all the right things. Then he meets this crazy old woman, played by Ruth Gordon. She had this "fuck you mentality." She did whatever she wanted and she had no respect for anything. She was old and she could get away with it and he just absolutely adored her. They even landed in bed together: he was in his late teens while she was eighty. It broke all the taboos. Maude was so honest it threw everybody off, but she was the only one who was happy in that entire movie. You saw all these other anal-retentive people that were doing all the things that society demanded of them. What Harold loved about Maude was that she just didn't give a damn about society and she was the most real person in the whole movie. It's a wonderful movie, I recommend it.

Another movie that has recently come out that I identify with is called Powder. It's about a boy whose mother was struck by lightning while she was carrying him. From this, he became a total albino, with no hair and white skin. He also had psychokinetic powers. Something happened in his brain and he developed this ability. He grew up feeling incredibly lonely because he was different from everyone else. That was the metaphor for me of being gay.

Co-Researcher #3

(none provided).

Co-Researcher #4

The movie Priest had a profound effect upon me. It really opened my eyes to the oppression that we face as gay people. Some of Boy George's and George Michael's music when he was in WAM helped me when I was coming out.

Co-Researcher #5
Oh God, yeah. It was all in the early eighties. There was the Gloria Gainer song I Am What I Am and the Pamela Stanley song called Coming Out of Hiding, which was played during the first time I marched in a gay parade. Now every time I hear these songs I get a positive mental picture of these gay men marching proudly down a busy street. There was gay happiness everywhere. As for visual, the first time I ever stepped foot in San Francisco was it. I've been to many coastal cities, like Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Toronto, but San Francisco takes your breath away. If I ever think of retiring in a wonderful place, that place would be San Francisco. It is something to go and see. It's incredible.

Co-Researcher #6
I very much liked and identified with the play, Angels in America - Parts I and II. The play is about being gay, but there is also a huge political overtone to it about the crazy world that's changing. That speaks to me.

Co-Researcher #7
A metaphor for me would be the title of a song, I Will Survive. In my teens and twenties, I had to survive through what I went through with my family. It also means I will leave behind me prints. For me it's art. It's my deep feeling about friendship and the people I encountered.

Co-Researcher #8
I have never really found anything that encompassed all of my perceptions about being gay or the relativity of being gay. I think more about things I did with people. Very important to me was my experience with creating the university gay organization and the others who were involved. The most important thing to me now are my personal friends. In my experience, the straight community does not provide much support to gay people. Therefore, gay people rely more on their friends for that support. I think that most gay people have a group of friends that are more intimately important to them as compared to most heterosexual people. I believe that straight people often do not have really close intimate relationships with their friends.

Co-Researcher #9
Cybil Shepherd did an album and one song is called, I Told You I Love You, Now Get Out. That describes one of my gay moods. Then there's another from the playgirls of 1953, the song If You Don't See What You Want Up Here, What Do You Want. Let's see it goes like this, *"If you don't see what you want up here then honey, what the heck do you want. If you don't see what you want up here then get yourself a debutante. If we hold no appeal, speak up the time is right, we've got a fellow back stage that might be more your type. If you don't see what you want up here, you should go back to bed."*

I can find gay moments and phrases in almost every song that I know. I remember these things from Julie Brown's song called, The Home Coming Queen's Got A Gun. It went something like *"how could you do what you just did? Debbie's smiling and waving her gun, picking off cheerleaders one by one. Buff's pompom just blew to bits and Mitsy's head just did the splits. God, my best friend's on a shooting spree, stop it Debbie you're embarrassing me. How could you do what you just did, you're having a really bad period."* I could go on and on.

The song title that really grips me is Don't Worry, Be Happy. It's really an annoying song, but it's got a good message. It's like, *"don't worry, even if your having trauma, be happy because it can only get better."*

Co-Researcher #10
I really don't dwell on the fact that my identity is gay. I am just another human being so my enjoyment of music, arts, and movies and all that are basically just "run of the mill." I can't really say that there is one particular one that I would identify with as being gay. There is a movie called Torch Song Trilogy starring Anne Bancroft which touched me, however. It basically took me back to my younger years of what society was really like. It portrayed a part where the mother became more accepting of her gay son.

Co-Researcher #11
One that comes to mind immediately is the song My Way, sung by Frank Sinatra. The broadway musical and the film La Cage Aux Folles would be another one that comes readily to mind. Another movie that speaks to my gay identity is Philadelphia.

Co-Researcher #12
I like the music of the *Flirtations* and *Romanowsky and Philips*. The *Flirtations* are a gay acapello group, similar to the *Nylons*. *Romanowsky and Philips* are like a gay Simon & Garfunkel pair. I also like songs like Rise Up by the *Parachute Club* and things like that.

Co-Researcher #13
Gloria Gainer singing I Am What I Am. That song is from the broadway musical La Cage Aux Folles and it was sung by the drag queen.

When I first came out, I went through a phase of feeling that being gay was almost everything. I wore all the buttons and the badges. I was into volunteer work here, there, and everywhere. I went to bars and did the whole scene. Recently at a cross-cultural workshop, a model called the identity flower was presented. Each petal on the flower represents something about you: where you were born, where you grew up, the language you speak, your gender, etcetera. All of these things together form a flower. That's where I'm at now in terms of positive gay identity. I am a man who happens to be gay. Being gay is merely one petal on the flower, and that is a part of the whole. It's no more or no less important than any other aspect of who I am. I think this is a healthy view of identity.

Co-Researcher #14
(none provided).

Co-Researcher #15
There are a lot of images and metaphors that mean an incredible amount to me. Their significance isn't limited to my journey or my struggle with my sexuality . . . they're about my life.

Co-Researcher #16
When I was twelve or thirteen, the movie Stand by Me came out. That really spoke to my gay identity. These four guys are like brothers. They're so close and they have something in

common. It wasn't about gay teens, but it was for me because that is where I was at. The four of them did have an intimate relationship. Who knows if it was sexual or not, but I would bet that it would have been in that situation. One of my tricks, who was much older than I, showed me the movie Torch Song Trilogy. At age fifteen, I watched that movie and cried. In the nineties came Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, and that also portrays what gay is about.

I don't know if the song Let It Be by the Beatles is about gay identity, but it does speak to my identity. Just let it be and it will happen, it will work out.

Appendix F:

Responses to My Question #20

Note: I asked each of the co-researchers the following question near the end of their interview. Here is a compiliation of their edited responses:

"Do you practice any rituals as a way of celebrating your gay identity?"

Co-Researcher #1

Pride day is a ritual and participating in the entire pride weekend. I really enjoy that and I fully partake in those weekends, as a celebration. Going out on New Year's Eve is a bit of a ritual. Getting dressed up and going out to the gay club occasionally is a ritual as well. I also make a point of going to the gay bars when I'm in a different city.

Co-Researcher #2

You mean aside from masturbation? Turning on a good porn flick? I don't in fact, but what a wonderful idea. I was very conscious of the fact that even before I really came out, I knew I had to be completely reborn.

Co-Researcher #3

I prefer to travel where I can feel comfortable being who I am, where there is a gay community. I'm thinking of going to the gay games in Amsterdam and I did go to the gay games in Vancouver and that was a wonderful experience. I'm now involved with Team Calgary in a fund development capacity. It's a group that raises funds to assist both athletes and people who want to go to the gay games. I would say my involvement is a celebration of being gay.

Co-Researcher #4

(None provided).

Co-Researcher #5

I try to attend any gay events that I can and going out and making sure I keep abreast with gay issues in my own community. I do that on a regular basis, although lately I've become a real hermit.

Co-Researcher #6

Around 12 or 13 years ago, my gay roommate decided that he wasn't going home to Ontario for Christmas. I wasn't either so we decided to throw a Christmas Eve open house and a Christmas Day dinner. We invited gay men and lesbians who were somewhat on their own, and I've continued to do this every year since. I also have a very large open house New Year's Eve with mostly gay men and lesbians attending. People have come to expect these traditions. I couldn't not do it anymore. People show up even if they don't get an invitation because I don't make a big deal about it. Some people who have moved out of town are back here at Christmas because they expect it. So do I.

I used to have a grand piano in here and people sang Christmas songs. I would dress up as the drag queen "Dame Edna" and do a couple of Christmas songs and crazy things like that. I was always overly ridiculous in my drag queen outfit and I can't sing either. Now I don't do Dame Edna anymore and I haven't for some years. Instead, I read a Christmas story by Rita Mae Brown. It's an extremely funny story.

I also throw a tacky Ukrainian Christmas party which I suppose is a bit of a ritual. It's all gay men and lesbians and they have to bring the tackiest gift that they can find, unsigned and wrapped. Then I play the Baba wearing my little skirt and I hand out the gifts. I also make Ukrainian food even though I'm not Ukrainian.

Co-Researcher #7
One ritual is my art. Although I am bilingual, the language that I have mastered the most is art. The language of exactly who I am is my drawings. I really believe that the only place I can be myself and exalt my gayness is in my drawings. I think in my own way I'm trying to unite gay people with straight people through my friendships, through my life, and through my art.

Co-Researcher #8
(None provided).

Co-Researcher #9
I wear funky, out-of-the-ordinary T-shirts to the bar and stuff. I have one T-shirt that has the word "FAG" in big pink letters. Another shirt says "no funny after taste." Other shirts say "Queer Boys" and "Kit Kat Club." It's not really a ritual, but a fad I enjoy is wearing gay rings and necklaces. I recovered the couch and chairs in gay colors and I put a rainbow on the pillows as well.

Co-Researcher #10
(Not asked).

Co-Researcher #11
I've never entered into any kind of celebration, joined any club, or done any particular thing because it was just gay. Until two weeks ago, the answer would definitely would have been no. I went with my partner to a gay Club Med. I was very impressed at how well run it was. There were 650 gay and lesbian guests at the hotel that participated in the whole week of activities. One male couple there that had been together for 42 years. Most of the people were in their thirties and forties and had beautiful bodies.

Co-Researcher #12
(Not asked).

Co-Researcher #13
I make a point of celebrating December 17th, which is the anniversary of my coming out in London and I make a point of celebrating June 14th, which is the date of my coming out in Edmonton. Around December 17th, I wear a t-shirt that a friend made for me when I go out to the bar. It's got the Harrod's logo and it says *"Harrods, December 17, 1983, I was there."* The t-shirt also has all sorts of smoke and crap and corruption going off all over the place. I celebrate

a lot of my rituals when I'm in England. I go to familiar places. I also make a point from time to time of remembering friends who are with me only in spirit.

I don't run around wearing my issues on my sleeve anymore. I don't wear my badges and my flags and stuff like that. I don't need to now.

Co-Researcher #14, #15, and #16
(Not asked).

Appendix G:

The Themes and Categories

BEFORE COMING OUT

(NOTE: although the following categories and themes were initially experienced by a number of my co-researchers before coming out, many of the themes continue throughout their development. For some co-researchers, certain themes appeared later, either during or after their coming out)

<table>
<tr><th>CATALYSTS</th><th>HINDRANCES</th></tr>
<tr><td><u>Developing An Increased Awareness of Being Gay and Gay Culture</u>
(1) Growing Awareness of Sexual Orientation
-Feeling Different
-Sexual Fantasies/Dreams
-Sexual/Erotic Arousal and Attraction
-Incomplete or Unsatisfying Connection to Females
-Sexual Acts
-Falling in Love with Another Male
-Uncommon Attractions

(2) The Inside Journey (eg., questioning, soul-searching)

(3) The Outside Journey (eg., Exploring the Gay World)
-Relocation
-Pursuing External Validation</td><td><u>Fear and Condemnation of Homosexuals</u>
(1) By Self
-Internalized Homophobia
-Self-Concept/Esteem Related
-Minimization/Denial
-Overcompensation/Distraction
-Consequences of Denial
-Heterofacsimile (ie., wanting and attempting to be straight)

(2) By Others
-Minimization by Others

(3) By Self and Others
-Code of Silence
-Stereotypes
-Isolation/Rejection</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">INFLUENCES THAT EITHER SERVE AS CATALYSTS OR HINDRANCES</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Parental/Familial Influence
Cultural or Church Influence
Peer Influence
Societal Influence</td></tr>
</table>

COMING OUT (TO SELF)

-Labelling Onself as Gay (may be experienced as a Turning Point or Crisis)
-Dealing With the Emotions
    -Negative Emotions
    -Positive Emotions
-Reducing Internalized Homophobia
    -Correcting Stereotypes
    -Resolving Inner Conflicts (eg., restructuring beliefs)
-Learning the Gay Role
-Becoming Certain

TOWARD ESTABLISHING A POSITIVE GAY IDENTITY

<table>
<tr><th>CONNECTING WITH SELF</th><th>CONNECTING WITH THE GAY WORLD</th><th>RECONNECTING WITH THE STRAIGHT WORLD</th></tr>
<tr><td>-Embracing Wholeness
-Attaining Authenticity
-Becoming Free, Feeling Free
-Embracing Self-Love
-Developing a Positive Gay Schema
-Feeling Positive
-Self-Acceptance
-Embracing and Releasing Personal Power
-Timing and Readiness
-Developing Strength of Character and Autonomous Thinking
-Standing Up for One's Beliefs</td><td>-Gaining a Collective Sense of Gay Identity
-Involvement in Gay Community (some to the point of saturation)
-Celebrating Gayness (Gay Pride)
-Pursuing or Having Relationships
-Acting as an Ambassador of Change</td><td>-Disclosing to Others
-Dealing with Family and Significant Others
-Managing the Consequences of External Homophobia (eg., harassment, violence)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">CONSOLIDATION OF IDENTITY
(integration of self, gay world, and straight world)</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix H:

The Themes Questionnaire

The Themes Questionnaire that was completed by each co-researcher and myself is reprinted below with some modification from the original. In the version mailed to everyone, the categories and themes were not included. Furthermore, the tabulations in the right columns were not listed of course either. As two co-researchers had passed away before this the questionnaire was constructed, the questionnaire was completed by everyone remaining, a total of 15 individuals. In the right columns, the first number is the number out of 15 who responded to the item, followed by the percentage.

THEMES QUESTIONNAIRE

Please place a check mark beside each theme that you experienced at some time in the past and/or in the present during your building of a positive gay identity. If the question doesn't apply to you, leave the past and present columns blank.

#	THEME	CHECK HERE: Past	Present
I.	**FEAR AND CONDEMNATION OF HOMOSEXUALS**	XXX	XXX
1.	***Internalized Homophobia*** - Did you ever feel afraid of the fact that you might be gay? Did this fear prevent you from being becoming totally accepting of yourself as a gay man?	14 = 93%	0
2.	***Self-Concept/Esteem Related*** - Did you ever feel that your self-concept or self-esteem was negatively affected because you were gay?	14 = 93%	0
3.	***Minimization/Denial*** - Did you ever attempt to minimize your gay feelings or same-sex attraction, or deny that it even existed?	13 = 87%	0
4.	***Overcompensation/Distraction*** - Did you ever work overly hard in your employment to avoid dealing with your gayness, or did you use another means as a way of distracting yourself away from dealing with your sexuality?	8 = 53%	1 = 7%
5.	***Consequences of Denial*** - Have you suffered any negative or positive consequences as a result of remaining in the closet prior to coming out to yourself? NOTE: "Coming out to yourself" does not refer to disclosing to others.	7 = 47%	0
6.	***Heterofacsimile*** - Did you ever try very hard to be straight?	10 = 67%	1 = 7%

7.	***Minimization by Others*** - Did you ever find that at least one other person has attempted to minimize your gayness? Example: Being told *"it's just a phase."*	9 = 60%	3 = 20%
8.	***Code of Silence*** - Did you ever find that you and/or others you knew have attempted to keep quiet about the whole topic of gays and gayness?	14 = 93%	9 = 60%
9.	***Stereotypes*** - Did you ever personally believe in some of the stereotypes about gay people? Example: *"gays are perverts."*	11 = 73%	1 = 7%
10.	***Isolation/Rejection*** - Did you ever feel isolated or rejected by others because you are gay?	10 = 67%	4 = 27%
II.	**DEVELOPING AN INCREASED AWARENESS OF BEING GAY AND GAY CULTURE**	**XXX**	**XXX**
11.	***Questioning-Rebelling-Soul Searching-Thinking Inward*** - Did you ever seriously question whether you were gay or not?	11 = 73%	1 = 7%
12.	***Exploring the Gay World and Increasing Awareness*** - Were you exposed to the gay world prior to coming out? Examples: Trying out sexual behaviors with other males, perusing gay eroticism, attending gay functions.	12 = 80%	1 = 7%
13.	***Relocation*** - Prior to coming out to yourself, did you move your residence as a means of facilitating your coming out?	8 = 53%	0
14.	***Pursuing External Validation*** - Did you turn to others to help you decide whether or not you were indeed gay? This includes turning to friends or family for advice and seeking out the help of a professional therapist.	7 = 47%	2 = 13%
III.	**CATALYSTS AND HINDRANCES (INFLUENCES THAT HELP OR HURT COMING OUT)**	**XXX**	**XXX**
15.	***Parental/Familial Influence*** - Did your parents or family of origin influence your coming out in any way, either by assisting it or hurting it?	9 = 60%	3 = 20%
16.	***Church Influence*** - Did religious beliefs influence your coming out in any way, either by assisting it or hurting it?	5 = 33%	0
16a	***Cultural Influence*** - Did your cultural heritage influence your coming out in any way, either by assisting it or hurting it?	4 = 27%	1 = 7%
17.	***Peer Influence*** - Did your peers influence your coming out in any way, either by assisting it or hurting it? NOTE: peers refers to both your friends and acquaintances.	10 = 67%	2 = 13%
18.	***Societal Influence*** - Did societal values influence your coming out in any way, either by assisting it or hurting it?	14 = 93%	4 = 27%
IV.	**COMING OUT (TO SELF)**	**XXX**	**XXX**

19.	***Turning Point or Crisis*** - Did you come out after experiencing a major turning point in your life, or even a crisis?	8 = 53%	0
20.	***Accepting the Label "Gay"*** - Did you find it difficult to use the label "gay" in either defining yourself, or in describing yourself to other people?	9 = 60%	0
21.	***Dealing with Negative Emotions*** - Did you experience negative emotions during your process of coming out to yourself? Examples: depression, anxiety, anger, and embarrassment.	11 = 73%	0
22.	***Dealing with Positive Emotions*** - Did you experience positive emotions during your process of coming out to yourself? Examples: exhilaration, euphoria, and relief.	14 = 93%	4 = 27%
23.	***Feeling the Oppression*** - Have you suffered any form of discrimination, harassment, or even violence as a result of being gay?	6 = 40%	5 = 33%
24.	***Overcoming Internalized Homophobia*** - Have you needed to overcome internalized homophobia in your development as a gay man? Examples: overcoming a fear of being intimate with another male, or a fear of being connected with gay people.	11 = 73%	1 = 7%
25.	***Correcting Stereotypes*** - Have you ever needed to correct stereotypes that you held about gay people?	12 = 80%	5 = 33%
26.	***Resolving Inner Conflicts/Restructuring Beliefs*** - In addition to question #24 and #25 above, have you needed to resolve other internal conflicts or change your beliefs in some way about being gay?	6 = 40%	3 = 20%
27.	***Becoming Certain*** - Did you go through a process of becoming certain that you are gay?	10 = 67%	0
28.	***Learning the Non-Sexual Gay Role*** - Did you need to learn what it meant to be gay? Examples: Learning how to be gay, or learning what was socially acceptable as a gay man.	9 = 60%	1 = 7%
28a	***Learning the Sexual Gay Role*** - Did you need to learn how to act in a sexual manner with members of the same sex? Examples: learning how to interact in a sexual manner with another male, or learning how to initiate a sexual liaison with a male.	8 = 53%	2 = 13%
V.	**ESTABLISHING A POSITIVE IDENTITY (after coming out)**	**XXX**	**XXX**
29.	***Embracing Wholeness*** - Did you feel that part of your experience in building a positive gay identity was to become whole or complete in some sense?	9 = 60%	9 = 60%
30.	***Attaining Authenticity*** - Did you feel that proclaiming yourself to be gay was part of becoming more authentic or developing greater integrity?	12 = 80%	11 = 73%

31.	***Becoming Free*** - Did coming out to yourself help you to feel that you had become free, or liberated, in some sense?	15 = 100 %	7 = 47%
32.	***Embracing Self-Love*** - Did you feel that part of your experience in building a positive gay identity was to learn to love yourself as a gay person?	13 = 87%	8 = 53%
33.	***Self-Acceptance*** - Did you feel that part of your experience in building a positive gay identity was to become more accepting of who you are?	14 = 93%	9 = 60%
34.	***Feeling Positive*** - Has coming out to yourself helped you to feel more positive about your life in a general sense?	12 = 80%	9 = 60%
35.	***Developing a Gay Positive Schema*** - Did you feel that you needed to develop a positive view of gayness as part of your experience in building a positive gay identity?	11 = 73%	5 = 33%
36.	***Standing Up for One's Beliefs*** - Did you feel that part of your experience in building a positive gay identity was learning to stand up for your beliefs about being gay?	13 = 87%	12 = 80%
37.	***Independent/Strength of Character*** - Do you think that either becoming independent in your thinking and your actions or developing strength of character had anything to do with building a positive gay identity?	10 = 67%	8 = 53%
38.	***Readiness*** - In your experience, do you think that the timing of when you came out to yourself is important?	10 = 67%	2 = 13%
39.	***Dealing with External Homophobia*** - Referring back to question #23, if you have suffered any form of discrimination, harassment, or violence because you are gay, have you found a way to deal with this external homophobia in a positive manner?	3 = 20%	3 = 20%
40.	***Celebrating Gayness/Gay Pride*** - Have you experienced a way or ways of celebrating your gayness? Have you felt proud of yourself as a gay man?	9 = 60%	10 = 67%
41.	***Saturation*** - Have you gone through a period when nearly your entire identity was defined by being gay?	8 = 53%	2 = 13%
42.	***Collective Gay Identity*** - Have you felt that part of your identity as a gay man is defined by the gay community, or by what you expect gay people to be?	7 = 47%	6 = 40%
43.	***Disclosing to Others*** - Has disclosing your gayness to others helped you to build a positive gay identity?	13 = 87%	11 = 73%
44.	***Dealing with Family*** - Do you think that disclosing your gayness to family members, and attempting to work through the issues this may have created, was an important part of building a positive gay identity?	12 = 80%	7 = 47%

45.	***Consolidation of Identity*** - Have you gone through the experience of amalgamating your gay identity with your other identities? In other words, do your other identities define you nearly as much as does your gay identity? NOTE: Other identities may include defining yourself by your work, your hobbies, your philosophy of life, or the roles you play on a daily basis.	10 = 67%	12 = 80%
VI.	**TAKING A PRO-ACTIVE STANCE**	**XXX**	**XXX**
46.	***Involvement in Gay Community*** - Have you sought out involvement in the gay community through attending gay events or gay venues, or by spending time with other gay people?	15 = 100 %	14 = 93%
47.	***Ambassadors of Change*** - Have you found yourself doing things which help gay people in some way? Examples: Volunteering or becoming involved in gay organizations, helping youth to come out, or giving money to gay causes.	14 = 93%	13 = 87%
48. i.e., VII	**PURSUING OR HAVING RELATIONSHIPS** - Are you either in a relationship, or wanting to establish one if you meet someone compatible?	8 = 53%	11 = 73%
VIII	**SEXUAL ORIENTATION INDICATORS**	**XXX**	**XXX**
49.	***Sexual Fantasies/Dreams*** - Have your sexual fantasies or erotic dreams mostly involved other males, as compared to mostly females?	14 = 93%	14 = 93%
50.	***Falling in Love*** - Have you had the experience yet of falling in love with another male?	14 = 93%	5 = 33%
51.	***Incomplete or Unsatisfying Connection to Females*** - Have you ever experienced an incomplete or unsatisfying physical connection, or sexually bond, with females?	9 = 60%	0
52.	***Uncommon Attractions*** - Have you experienced attractions that are not considered part of the "mainstream" gay community? Example: fetishes.	4 = 27%	6 = 40%
53.	***Feeling Different*** - As a child, did you ever feel "different" from other boys as a direct result of being gay? NOTE: If you still feel significantly different from straight people, also check in the PRESENT column.	14 = 93%	7 = 47%